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BUCKSKIN SAM'S WILD RIDE.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.



SAM MOUNTED ARROW WITHOUT SADDLE OR BRIDLE AND AT FULL GALLOP PICKED UP HIS SOMBRERO WITH EASE.

Buckskin Sam's Wild Ride;

OR,

PLAZA AND PLAIN.

Adventures of Major Sam S. Hall, the Noted
Texan Ranger, Scout, Guide, Ranchero
and Indian-Fighter of the
South-west Border.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "ADVENTURES OF BUFFALO
BILL," "ADVENTURES OF WILD
BILL," "TEXAS JACK,"
"BRUIN ADAMS,"
ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MIDNIGHT ASSASSINS.

BUCKSKIN SAM was, so to speak, born for a borderman, for, from his earliest childhood, the surroundings of his father's extensive farm in Massachusetts was not large enough for his roving humor, and he was wont to go on little pilgrimages to scenes of a wilder nature.

Mounted on a pony, playing shepherd and cattle-driver to his father's sheep and cows, he spent his time in practicing equestrian feats, snaring birds, shooting at a mark, or reading stories of Indians, which was the only literature he cared aught about.

At a very early age he determined to start toward his Mecca—the prairies of far-away Texas.

His parents opposed the idea, but Sam had "Injun on the brain," and with his grip-sack as his only luggage, and a few dollars, given him by his mother, he started from home.

A few dollars will not carry a boy far by railroads, and Sam soon discovered this, and to earn more became a newsboy on a train.

As soon as he got enough money for another move, he went on to New York, and there, through the influence of an old playmate, who was located in the great metropolis, he got a situation in a hotel as a kind of general-do-anything boy.

This situation, however, was the laying of the corner-stone of his future famous career, as the reader will shortly discover.

Worn out one night, and being off duty for a short while, he slipped into a room he knew to be unoccupied, for a perfect rest, and where he felt he could remain undisturbed until he got his nap out.

The room was a large one and in an out-of-the-way part of the hotel, and was only used when the house was crowded.

Sam had taken a blanket and crept under the bed, and was instantly so sound asleep that he was only awakened, several hours after, by hearing voices.

He soon recalled as to where he was, and then peeped cautiously out.

Two men were in the room; one of them was a brutal-faced ruffian in good clothes, and the other a handsome man in undress naval uniform.

A table was between them, and as Sam woke up, he heard the good-looking man say:

"Well, help me to do the job thoroughly, and I'll give you the thousand."

"Do you think he has the money with him?" asked the other.

"Oh, yes, for he never would leave it; but you are sure he said he would visit you here?"

"Yes, for I told him I had money I wanted to invest in Texas, and wished he'd let me go back with him, and he said he would come to my room at twelve o'clock, after he came from the theater."

"I knew the location of this room, and so gave him its number, and was glad to find it unoccupied when I came to-night."

"It is well suited for our plan, as it is off to itself."

"Now it is twelve minutes to twelve, so I'll take the closet, and you have him sit so that his back will be toward me."

"At the proper time cover him with your pistol, and I'll spring out and drive my knife in his back."

"It must be done well, for a loud cry will—"

"Trust me for that, for I know well how to send a knife to a man's heart, having had some experience in that way," was the grim reply, and the man attired as a sailor arose and went into a small closet in one end of the room, while the other took up a paper and pretended to read.

It was certainly a most perilous position for young Sam, as he knew that the slightest sound would betray his presence.

Did he show himself, he felt that his death would follow, for those two plotting assassins would never allow him to betray them, or to thwart them in their murderous scheme.

He covered his nose and mouth with his hands to prevent breathing aloud, and waited in breathless suspense and anxiety.

The minutes dragged away, with an impatient remark from one or the other of the men, and they seemed hours to poor Sam.

Glancing around mechanically his eyes lighted upon an iron bed-wrench, that had been overlooked by those putting up the bed.

It lay against the wall, and it seemed as if

the very contact of his pants with the carpet, made a frightful noise, as the youth crept toward what was to him a weapon he could use with deadly force.

Hardly had his hand reached it, when a quick, firm step, and a shuffling one, were heard in the hall approaching the room.

"This is number thirteen, sir," said a call-boy, whose voice Sam recognized.

A knock at the door was answered by the man at the table saying bluntly:

"Come in!"

A tall man, evidently by his dress and appearance a stranger to the city, entered.

He wore a broad sombrero of black felt, his hair and beard were very long, and were sprinkled with gray, yet his face was kindly, and his voice not unpleasant, as he said:

"Well, my would-be Texan, I have come to see you, according to agreement, to answer all the questions you wish to ask about my State."

"Be seated, captain, and take a drink, and we'll talk it over," said the intended assassin, and he pushed a flask and glass toward his unsuspecting visitor, and gave him the chair with his back to the closet.

"Thank you, I never indulge, and that's the only thing I'm not a Texan in."

"You want to become planter, or stock-raiser, eh, or both?"

"I have thought of both, sir."

"See, here is a map, and if you'll glance at it, you can tell me if I have done right in my selection of a locality to settle."

He held the map close to him as he spoke, and the Texan bent far over the table to glance at it.

"Now," said the ruffian, in a drawling tone, as though beginning a sentence, to the Texan, but which was meant as a signal to his accomplice.

Instantly the closet door swung open, and with cat-like steps the assassin advanced toward his victim, a long bowie-knife clasped in his right hand.

But at the same moment Sam sprung out from his lurking-place, the bed-wrench in his hand, and gave a cry of warning.

But he was too late to prevent the blow, and the blade sunk deep into the back of the Texan.

Yet he tried to avenge him, and struck his assassin a severe blow with the wrench, which brought him to his knees, and then hurled the piece of iron at the other.

It went straight, and struck him in the head, felling him like a log, just as the Texan grasped Sam by the shoulder with a giant strength, and cried:

"Hold me, boy, while I kill that man."

He had drawn a revolver as he spoke, and seeing it, the sailor, half-stunned by the blow

from Sam, bounded toward the door, and escaped through it, closing it and locking it behind him.

Though the Texan had drawn his pistol, he had not the strength to fire, and, with a moan, fell to the floor, dragging Sam with him.

It was with difficulty that Sam released himself from his grasp, and managed to reach the bell-rope, which he rung furiously.

In a short while the night-clerk and two call-boys appeared in alarm, and beheld Sam, with the Texan's revolver, standing over the now recovering ruffian, and the victim lying prone upon the floor, bleeding profusely from the wound in his back.

In a word Sam told what had happened, and the clerk sent for the police, and a physician being called in, the Texan was taken to his own room in the hotel and made as comfortable as possible, though it was evident that he could not live.

CHAPTER II.

A BOY'S PLEDGE.

"DOCTOR, I suppose my chips are called in?" calmly asked the Texan, after the wound had been dressed by the physician, whom he addressed in the border style.

"If you mean that your wound is a dangerous one, I must say that it is," returned the doctor.

"I asked you if I could live."

"You want a direct answer?"

"Being a square man and never dodging anything, I do," was the firm response.

"You will not live ten hours."

"That's flat-footed, anyhow, Doc, and I'll take your word for it, and set things to rights."

"Now see if that reptile who took me in with his want-to-go-to-Texas-plot is able to talk."

The doctor left the room, and Sam remained by the side of the wounded man, who asked him to do so.

Soon the doctor returned and said:

"You struck him a severe blow, sir, and his skull is fractured."

"For awhile he seemed only stunned, but he's going fast."

"What! he'll die?"

"Yes, sir, you killed him."

Sam was about to speak, when the Texan pressed his hand and gave a warning look, which caused him to remain quiet.

"He is unable to talk, then?" asked the Texan.

"Yes, and will barely live as long as you do."

"Then I shall have company along the dark road."

"I did hope he could talk, so as to get

some information from him about the king bee of this bit of deviltry, and whom I recognized, but was not strong enough to shoot, so he got away."

"Will you give his name and describe him to the police, so they can find him?"

"No, for it would do no good, as he leaves a blind trail."

"Oh, he's a sharp one, he is; but I'll yet circumvent him."

"Now, Doc, if you've patched me up as well as you can, leave me with this boy, for I want to tell him something; but don't stay long, as I feel myself growing weaker."

The physician quietly left the room, and the Texan turned to Sam:

"What is your name?"

"Samuel Stone Hall, sir."

"Where do you hail from?"

"I'm a Yankee boy, sir."

"Well, I like Yankee boys, men and women, for they are square clean through when they are your friend, and cantankerous cusses when they are not."

"How old are you?"

"Fifteen."

"Well, you've got a sharp eye, resolute mouth, are put up like a mustang, and I can vouch for your pluck, for I saw you show it, and you did for that fellow to-night."

"Why did you wish to take the act upon yourself, sir?"

"To save talk."

"I'll make my ante-mortem statement and show you are not to blame, and you can tell the coroner your story, for a man isn't dead in these parts until a jury has sat on him."

"Now tell me, what made you leave home?"

"To make my way in the world unaided, sir."

"By the Star of Texas, but you'll do it; but a hotel isn't the place to start in."

"I am only here, sir, to get money enough to go to Texas."

"Boy, you are a brick, and your head is as level as the prairie before my ranch."

"Man made this fine town, but God made the prairies, and there is where you must go."

"I have seen you about the hotel the past week, and had my eye on you for a boss boy, and now you've done me a good turn, and I want you to do me another."

"I am willing, sir."

"It is to go to Texas for me."

"Oh, sir, I would be so glad to go, as Joe and I have been trying to get off for weeks."

"Who is Joe?"

"Joe Booth, sir, a friend of mine from Massachusetts, where I lived."

"Oh, yes, your pard?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is he square?"

"Indeed he is, sir."

"Got grit?"

"You mean courage, sir?"

"Yes, sand."

"He is awful plucky, sir."

"That settles it."

"Now, Sam Hall, I want you to strike for my ranch in Texas and take my belt of money to my wife and daughter, and tell them just how I died, and also prevent a piece of deviltry from going on there, which I know will be done if you don't stop it."

"Are you afraid to face a man when you are right and he is a murdering villain?"

"No, sir."

"Good! Now I'll tell you what I wish you to do, and you can take Joe with you, and I'll pay the wealth for the trip."

For some time did the Texan talk to Sam, and when he had made known his wishes, said:

"Do you mean to do this for me, Sam?"

"I do, sir."

"By all you hold sacred?"

"Yes, sir; I pledge myself by all I hold sacred."

"Give me your hand."

"There; now call in the sawbones and send the clerk for the coroner, so I can tell my little story, and he won't have to sit on me after I'm dead."

Sam did as he was told, and in the presence of witnesses the Texan gave him his belt of money, watch, and jewelry, and said he had given him instructions what to do with them, after he had paid for his burial.

That day, just as the sun set, and clasping Sam's hand, his spirit left the body, a smile remaining upon the stern, handsome face, even after death had placed his seal upon the lips.

In a lot in Greenwood Sam had his Texas friend buried, and after his examination by the authorities regarding the death of the ranchero and his assailant, he set out with his fast friend, Joe Booth, to find a vessel sailing for Texas.

A schooner was soon found, to sail for Indianola and Matagorda, and on board of this craft the two plucky boys took passage for Texas, the land of flower-bespangled prairies, crystal streams and thrilling adventures.

CHAPTER III.

A GALLANT RESCUE.

SAM had had an idea of the sea, as well as the prairies, and his run out to Texas on the schooner was sufficient for him to decide that he would prefer roving the land, to sailing the ocean.

There were a number of passengers on board, one of whom, William Young, better known as "Old Rocky," was a noted Texan.

and from him Sam and Joe learned many facts regarding the new country to which they were going, and also got much useful information to guide them after they should get there.

Sam remembers well to this day the words of "Old Rocky," as he sat on the deck one moonlight night, before reaching the Bahama Banks.

"Boy pards," he said, "don't yer go ter Texas with the idee you are goin' to kill and scalp Injuns for a living at so much a head, and that you can scare the white people of that community, by showing a six-shooter, for you'll get far off the trail.

"If you get into the Injun country, why fight 'em when you has to, and scalp them you kill if you like such trophies of war, and besides, an Injun hain't good dead until he's scalped.

"But don't say you've killed an Injun unless you have, for the boys in Texas want something to show for it.

"Don't make yerselves sociable round saloons, for there's always some onnery cusses hanging round that want to have a row, and you mus'n't fight unless you have to: but if you *have* to, be the last dog out of the fight.

"For convenience, learn to draw a six-shooter and empty it quick, and be sure you hit what you shoot at, and 'twon't go amiss if you practice a leetle with the bowie, if you go over toward the Rio Grande, where you'll find Greasers with their knives always ready to cut a throat.

"There are good ranches where you can get to be cowboys, and if you save your money and buy cattle, you can get a ranch for yourselves one of these days.

"If you go to Texas with any idee you can lick all creation you'll be cayote provender before you are much older."

This advice the two boys took to their hearts, and it served them well in after years, and Sam had the satisfaction long after, of hearing Old Rocky say to him:

"My pard, you have done well, and no whiter man lives in the Lone Star State than you are."

Upon arriving in the vicinity of the Bahama Banks a terrific tornado caught the trim schooner in its path, and for awhile all believed that she must go down, and the passengers all huddled together upon deck to face the worst.

Throughout the perilous ordeal Sam and Joe were perfectly cool, and the former caused several laughs at his witty remarks.

As the storm at last swept over, and the crew were getting sail on the schooner once more, a lurch of the vessel caused a huge wave to fall on board, which, sweeping aft,

carried on its bosom a young and lovely girl of sixteen, who was going to Texas with her father for her health.

Her shriek of terror rung out wildly in the darkness, and cries of horror arose upon all sides, as the passengers stood spellbound gazing at the white dress borne away upon the dark waters.

But they saw also another form upon the mad waves, and a dozen voices cried out:

"Two are lost! oh captain, save them!"

"No, it is Sam Hall, and he'll save her," cried Joe Booth in trumpet tones.

It was true, for Sam had sprung overboard an instant after the maiden, and as the white dress disappeared from the sight of those on the schooner's deck, he reached her side.

"Don't be frightened, miss, for you won't drown," he said calmly, as he put his arm about her waist, and sustained by his presence and cool courage, and upheld by his strong hand, she recovered her presence of mind, and with him peered through the darkness in the direction of the schooner.

The waves yet ran high, and the wind was blowing half a gale, so they were tossed about savagely in the waters; but Sam was a superb swimmer, and remarkably strong for his age and size, and possessed another quality he could rely upon, and that was wonderful endurance, and he knew he could hold out for a long time.

At last, after what seemed ages to those two so calmly facing death, there was a dark object seen upon the waters, and then a hoarse hail through a trumpet.

"Here we are," shouted back Sam in his clear tones, and he continued to call out until the life-boat, with the captain and the maiden's father in it, came down to them, and they were taken from the sea, and soon found themselves safe on board.

This incident made Sam a hero with all, from the passengers to the cabin-boys, and the father of the maiden presented him with a well-filled purse, which was refused almost indignantly.

But the maiden was an invalid, and that night of terror and struggle with the waters, caused her to fail rapidly, and ten days after she sent for Sam and said:

"You saved me from the sea, but you can not save me from Death now.

"When I die and become an angel, if I can, I will watch over you through life.

"Now I wish you to do me a favor.

"Will you?"

Sam bowed in answer, for his heart was too full to speak.

"There is no minister on board, and very soon I will be dead, and they will have to bury me in the deep sea, and I want *you* to read the burial service over me.

"Will you?"

"Yes, if you wish it," said Sam, firmly.

"Thank you."

"Now kiss me good-by, Sam, and remember I will be your guardian angel."

He kissed her forehead and turned quickly away and left the cabin.

Two days after she died, and the following night, when the sea was broken by hardly a ripple, and looked like burnished silver in the moonlight, Sam Hall stood by the body of poor Felice and read, in a firm, distinct voice, the service for the dead, the sobs of the maiden's father, and others deeply touched, alone breaking the silence of the sorrowful scene.

Then came the fatal plunge, and down into the dark waters sunk the canvas-wrapped form to a grave in the ocean depths, and Sam Hall, boy though he was, turned away from the vessel's side with a memory in his heart that will go with him to his own tomb.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST LESSON.

UPON landing at the long pier at Indianola, Sam and Joe felt that they were taking the first step toward carving out names for themselves in the future, and, getting their luggage ashore, walked up the street to a hotel with the air of Texans to the manor born.

Indianola at that time was a pretty lively place, and it was the resort of men of all kinds, from the wealthy cattle-man and his cowboy to the soldier and the buckskin-clad scout.

It was upon the latter that Sam and Joe cast the most admiring glances, for at last they beheld before their enraptured gaze men who had trailed the red-man to his lair, torn the scalp from the head, and engaged in innumerable desperate conflicts.

One old fellow, who looked as though he might indeed be made of buckskin, was their particular admiration, and beholding a kindly look in his eye, Sam approached him.

He saw that he was a man of note, for every one seemed to pay a certain deference to him, and while he was smoking his pipe on the piazza of the hotel after dinner, Sam edged his way near him and said:

"Are you an Indian-fighter, sir?"

"I have been, my boy, and it is dirty work I am glad to be free of; but now I'm a train boss," was the reply.

"What is that?" asked Sam, while Joe, seeing that his pard's head had not been snapped off by the mighty man, also drew near.

"A wagoner, or train boss, my boy, is one who is chief of a train of prairie-schooners—"

"*Prairie schooners?*"

"Yes, for we call our white-tilted wagons that cross the plains prairie-schooners."

"I am the chief of a train of a hundred schooners that start to-morrow for San Antonio, and if you boys want a good trip, and wish to learn how to rough it and become men, you have but to go along, and I'll get you places as extras to drive teams."

"Drive teams?" cried Sam, with delight and surprise, very willing to begin at the bottom round of the ladder and go up.

"Yes, and make boy bullwhackers."

"What do you say, lads?"

"You say you go to San Antonio, sir?" asked Sam.

"Yes."

"Is that not on the way to Fort San Saba?"

"Yes, my lad."

"Well, sir, I'll accept your kind offer, and I guess Joe will, too, for we are chums."

"Done, so consider yourselves boy bullwhackers, and get your traps on board my wagon, for you'll mess with me; but have you friends at San Saba?"

"No, sir, but I have business that calls me to that neighborhood," replied Sam, who then thanked the Texan for his kindness, and was turning away with Joe, when a wild-looking fellow dashed up on horseback, and with a bullwhip, in sheer deviltry, gave first one and then the other of the boys a lick with the lash that made them dance.

It was skillfully done, showing great experience in handling the whip upon the part of the horseman, and the two blows rung like pistol-shots, and caused the Texan to burst out in a loud laugh, in which several of his comrades, just then dashing up in front of the piazza, rudely joined.

Smarting with pain, Sam wheeled, and grabbing up a chair, started toward the bully, who had just dismounted.

"Boy, do yer raise yer hand ter me?" yelled the infuriated cowboy, for such he was.

As he spoke, he sprung toward Sam, who, undaunted, still advanced upon him, and Joe Booth, still rubbing the spot where the lash fell, came forward promptly to aid his pard.

"Hold on here!"

The speaker was the wagon boss, and he sprung between the cowboy and his young proteges.

"What have you got to do with it, Injun Granger?" cried the cowboy.

"I've got this to do with it, Bob Burt, that you are an infamous coward to strike those boys, and as I have them under my teaching now, I'll give them their first lesson with the bullwhip on your hide."

Quick as the spring of a panther the man in buckskin—who answered to the name of

Injun Granger, from the fact that the latter was his real cognomen, and the prefix had been bestowed from his numerous Indian battles—was upon the cowboy, and had wrenched from his hand the huge bullwhip he carried.

It was an exhibition of agility and strength that both surprised and pleased Sam and Joe, for the cowboy was a much larger man than was Injun Granger.

"Boys, help me out, fer ther Injun-killer hes got me," yelled the bully to his several comrades, as he felt that he was in the clutch of a giant.

There was a response from two of them, by two sharp reports, and two bullets whistled by the head of the wagon boss.

Instantly there came an answering shot, and one of the cowboys dropped from his horse.

"Quick as lightning and well done, boy," yelled the Indian-fighter, addressing Sam, who had fired the shot, and instantly he drew his own weapon, and another cowboy dropped, while the third wheeled his horse and rode away like the wind, to escape the fate of his companions.

All this had occurred in an instant of time, and the different witnesses to the affair now rushed forward and gathered around Injun Granger, his prisoner, and the two boys.

The two cowboys lay where they had fallen, one dead, shot through the brain by Granger, and the other writhing in agony, with a bullet from Sam's pistol in his body.

"Now, Bob Burt, I'm going to tie you, and give these boys their first lesson, and you deserve it, for you are the cause of the death of those two fellows.

"Give me your lariat, Tom," and Injun Granger turned to a bystander who readily handed the rope to him.

The clutch he held upon the cowboy was as though he had an iron hand and arm, and with remarkable skill and quickness he bound the fellow to a post of the piazza, wholly indifferent to the gathering crowd, none of whom seemed willing to interfere, and very few of whom gave a look at the dying man lying near.

Picking up the huge bullwhip, which Sam and Joe had sampled to their utmost dissatisfaction, Injun Granger gave one or two flourishes with it showing he fully understood its use, and said:

"Now, boys, as you are going to drive my private team for me, I want to give you a lesson in using this weapon.

"Bob Burt here, has left his mark on you, and I see you keep nursing the spot with your hands, and I want you to practice a little, and then give him one each he'll not forget soon

"What is your name, my boy?"

"Sam Hall."

"Well, Sammy, you have seen me flourish the whip, so now see what you can do with it."

Having had to drive cattle at home, and use a whip something of the same kind, Sam had an idea of the use of a bullwhip, and learned to make it ring with a rapidity that brought a cheer from the lookers on.

"Now, Sammy, there is your target, about center between Bob Burt's heels and head, so let fly."

Remembering the blow he had received, and which still felt as though a piece of red-hot iron was burning him, Sam was very willing to return the compliment, but said manfully:

"I hate to hit him when he's tied."

"Well said, my boy, and I'll untie him.

"But mind you, Bob Burt, if you start for that boy, I'll drop you dead in your tracks."

As Granger spoke he untied the cowboy, and drew his revolver and covered him with it.

"You hain't in yarnest ter let thet boy hit me, Granger?" growled Burt.

"I am, for, without the slightest provocation, you rode up and gave them blows that I'll warrant brought blood and blistered them, and I say turn about is fair play."

"Yer has kilt two of my pards."

"That is not you, Bob Burt, so shut up, for I'm going to have my way."

"If he hits me, I'll get even, and I won't forgit you neither; you hears me talk," savagely said the cowboy.

Granger laughed, and then said:

"Now, Burt, you stand still, or by Heaven I'll drop you dead, and you hear me talk.

"Turn your back, sir!"

With a muttered oath the cowboy obeyed, for in the hands of Injun Granger the revolver was a deadly weapon, and all knew the man.

"Now Sammy, let him have it, and don't go easy."

Sam gave several preliminary cracks with the whip, and then brought the lash down upon the back of the cowboy with a report that rung like a pistol-shot, and brought a howl of rage and anguish from the recipient, who was thoroughly cowed from any action, by the revolver of the Wagon Boss.

"Well done, Sammy, you have avenged yourself," shouted Granger, with his revolver still leveled, and then he called to Joe.

"Now, my son, it's your deal."

Joe took the bullwhip, and having carefully observed how it had been handled, after a few flourishes, gave his blow, which brought another howl from the cowboy, and a laugh from the spectators.

"Boys, you'll do, an' if you keep on, Texas will be proud of you."

"Now, Bob Burt, travel, and tell undertaker Simon to send me the bill for planting your pards, for I see t'other is dead now."

"Git!"

The cowboy "got," and with a hand upon the boys' shoulders, Injun Granger led them toward his camp.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST TRAIL.

THE trail by wagon train to San Antonio was a delightful one to the two boys, Sam and Joe, who amused themselves hunting up the oxen, driving and cooking, enjoying to their hearts' content as fun what in later years they found out to be hard work.

Arriving at their destination, they were promptly paid off by Injun Granger for their service, with a promise of more work when they wanted it, and some advice from the experienced old plainsman in regard to their future.

There was one thing that was constantly upon Sam's mind, and that was the pledge to the Texan ranchero who had been so cruelly murdered in New York.

There were circumstances connected with the case that caused him to keep the secret even from Joe, and to go on alone to the ranch of the Texan was his intention.

"Joe, you know I told you I had a duty to perform in coming to Texas," said Sam one day, the one following their arrival in San Antonio.

"Yes, Sam."

"Well, I've got to do it, and I move we set to work to build us a cabin in the timber we liked so well as we came along, opposite the Mission San Jose."

"I'm willing, Sam."

"Well, we'll go and buy some mustangs and get tools and set to work."

To decide with Sam was to act promptly, and that very evening found the boys encamped on the river bank, upon the spot chosen as the site for their ranch.

At daybreak the following day they went to work with their axes and soon cut out the timber, and in a week's time had a comfortable cabin built, with a stout log stable at the back for their ponies, of which purchases they were very proud.

In San Antonio they purchased what necessities they needed for house-furnishing and stores, and settled down with the air of millionaires upon their domain.

Here it was decided that Joe should stay and continue to set things to rights, while Sam went alone upon his pilgrimage to San Saba.

The day of departure coming round, Sam

bade Joe farewell and started northward, and ere he got out of sight of the cabin it was hard to tell which one of the two boys was the most lonesome.

Several times was Sam tempted to turn back and tell Joe that perhaps it would be best for him to go with him, and as many times Joe was on the eve of mounting his mustang and riding after his pard, telling him he feared to have him go on alone.

But both resisted the praiseworthy intention, and Sam continued on his way alone.

It was a most perilous undertaking for a man to undertake, even with prairie experience, and especially for a boy, as the Comanches were constantly upon the war-path, and it was no easy matter for one to follow the northward trail.

But Sam did not flinch from the dangerous work ahead, and held on his way most manfully.

He was well armed, with rifle, revolvers and bowie, his mustang was fleet, and full of endurance, and if he was not a born plainsman, he felt like one in his buckskin leggings, hunting-shirt, sombrero, and top-boots, with the regulation Texas spurs, not to speak of his Mexican saddle and bridle, and a lariat that he was constantly practicing with in the art of skillful throwing.

His first night alone on the prairie was a dismal one, and the wolves howled so mournfully about his camp, he almost wished he was back in Massachusetts, or had followed the sea as a cabin-boy.

But the night at last came to an end, and Sam continued on his way, following most closely the directions given him to keep his course.

But the second night, darkness came on him where there was no place near to camp, and to make matters worse, a severe storm swept over the prairies.

For awhile he stuck to the trail, but at last turned aside in search of shelter from the fierce "norther" that was raging.

After several hours of wandering, he saw timber ahead, and gladly sought its friendly shelter, for he was almost overcome.

He was about to dismount and build a fire, when he saw riding through the timber not far distant, three dark forms.

That he had not been discovered he well knew, and he remained in breathless suspense watching them, for something told him they were Indians.

They continued on for a short distance, and halted at the edge of what he now saw was a clearing, and hitching their horses, moved out of the shadow of the timber in the direction of a small cabin he had not before discovered.

Mounting his mustang, and now not near

as cold and fatigued as he was before, for the sight of those Indians had made him forget his sufferings, he rode carefully forward to where they had left their ponies.

A close glance at these showed that they were Indian ponies.

Unhitching them, he led them back in the timber some distance, made a circuit of a quarter of a mile and again hitched them.

Just then, as he was preparing to ride in the direction of the cabin again he heard a shot, followed by several loud war-whoops.

"Those red-skins are attacking the cabin, and I guess I can be of some service," he cried, and instantly he spurred forward toward the clearing.

CHAPTER VI.

SAM TO THE RESCUE.

SAM had had, as the reader is aware, no experience in Indian-fighting; but he was a youth of remarkable nerve, had drank in all the stories told about Indians around the camp-fire, on the march of the wagon-train to San Antonio, and had really studied all novels relating to Poor Lo, until he felt he knew just what to do in a fight with red-skins.

Recognizing Indians in the three horsemen, by their feathers, which he saw in the night, for it was bright starlight, and seeing the cabin in the clearing, he had decided that their object was to attack the settler who dwelt there, and his first move was to secure the horses, and thereby prevent a mounted retreat of the red-skins.

With the shot, followed by war cries, he felt that the fight had begun, and hence spurred in the direction at full speed.

A bright light suddenly gleamed before him, and he saw that the Indians had piled wood against the cabin and set it on fire.

One of the red-skins lay dead near the door, but the other two, from around the corner, were dancing about like mad, yelling and brandishing their knives savagely.

Sam was no person to weigh consequences, where he thought he could serve any one, and he dashed out of the timber with a yell, and with his rifle in hand, and reins held in his teeth.

The Indians spied Sam as he left the cover of the woods, and with marvelous quickness one threw forward a bow, and with the twang of the rawhide string an arrow was sent flying on its deadly errand.

It struck the mustang ridden by the boy fairly in the eye, and the brute dropped, hurling his rider over his head.

Sam felt himself falling, heard the triumphant yells of the red-skins, and struck the ground heavily, yet though he turned a complete summerset, he did not lose his presence

of mind, or release his hold upon his rifle.

Fortunately he stopped turning just in time, and was lying upon his back when he saw a red-skin above him.

To pull the trigger of his rifle, the muzzle of which pointed at the breast of the savage, and nearly touched it, was the work of an instant, and down upon him dropped the body of his foe.

To extricate himself from beneath the red-skin was the work of a second, and he arose to his feet, expecting another death-struggle, but saw to his delight the receding form of the third Indian flying for the timber.

Drawing a revolver he ran in pursuit, firing as he did so, more to keep him going, than with any hope of hitting him.

He heard the angry cry of the Indian, as he found the horses gone, and then listened to him as he continued his wild flight through the timber, evidently believing that he was surrounded by foes.

Returning toward the cabin, Sam saw a woman, and a boy of ten, fighting the blazing logs, and endeavoring to drag them away so as to save their home from destruction.

Quickly he ran to their aid, and in a few moments had the satisfaction of seeing the cabin no longer in danger.

Then the woman and the boy turned, and gazed curiously upon the young hero, while the former said in an earnest tone:

"You have saved us, young man, and we'll be your friends for life.

"My husband is away, and those red devils knew it; but Freddie brought one down, and then they tried fire on us, and we'd have all been killed but for you.

"Where did you come from?"

"San Antonio."

"Where's your camp?"

"I have no camp."

"Well; your friends are somewhere near?"

"No, I'm alone, and on my way to Fort San Saba."

"Well, you've got more pluck than most men, to rove these prairies alone.

"But come in and camp with us for the night, and to-morrow my old man will be home, and he'll thank you too."

Sam accepted the invitation, for now he began to feel how cold and hungry he was, after the excitement was over.

But first he went with the plucky little Freddie to where the Indian horses were tied, and brought them to the cabin, and was delighted to find in one of them a splendid animal, which would replace his own mustang.

"I'll give you one of them, Freddie," he said, and the youngster replied:

"And I'll give you suthin', too."

Sam went into the cabin then, and found the good woman preparing a substantial sup-

per for him and a good log-fire blazing cheerily on the hearth, for the norther had left the night cold.

There were three other children, all younger than Freddie, who welcomed him with staring him out of countenance; but he was in comfortable quarters, and did as he was told to do—made himself at home.

He had just begun his supper of bacon, venison, hoe-cake and coffee, when Freddie came in and said:

"I told yer I'd give yer suthin', an' here it is, for I gives you my Injun's scalp as well as yourn."

As he spoke he handed to Sam the bleeding scalps of two Indians.

In spite of himself Sam was shocked, and refused the valuable trophies, in Freddie's eyes, and found that his appetite was gone.

The following morning the settler returned with his stores, for he had been to the nearest Post to make purchases, and he grasped Sam's hand hard while he thanked him, and said:

"You are going to San Saba, you say, my boy.

"Waal, I'll not leave yer on these wild prairies until I see yer thar."

And he kept his word, for he guided Sam the rest of the way to the fort.

CHAPTER VII.

A PUPIL OF OLD LEATHER LEGS.

THE arrival of Sam at Fort San Saba was an event to him, for he had often pictured in his mind frontier garrisons, and longed to be one of the number that made up its gallant defenders.

When the settler made known that Sam had come on to his ranch alone from San Antonio, and had saved his cabin from the flames and his family from death, the boy was at once a hero, and the commandant sent for him and asked him many questions regarding his trip.

"Well, my boy, you have certainly done well, for I doubt if my best scouts could do better, and you deserve great credit for it.

"But what could have been your motive in taking such desperate chances as to come alone?"

"I wished to visit a ranch not many miles from here, sir, and deliver some papers I have for the lady living there."

"Whose ranch is it, my boy?"

"Captain Kenedy's, sir."

"Ah, yes, I know Kenedy well, and his ranch is north of here, near the Concho, and I'll send a squadron of soldiers with you, for the country is dangerously full of Indians."

"No, thank you, sir, I would rather go alone."

"Go alone?"

"Yes, sir, for I am determined to make a scout, and I can only learn by trusting wholly in myself."

"Well, you'll make a scout, my boy, that is certain; but don't think of going alone, for even Kenedy, as good a plainsman as he was, when he went to Galveston on his way to the East, got an escort of soldiers from me.

"Are you any relation to Luke Kenedy?"

"No, sir."

"You'll not find him at his ranch."

"I know that, sir, for he is dead."

This was startling news to the colonel, and he listened with surprise, sorrow, and indignation, while Sam told him of the assassination of the Texas ranchero in the hotel in New York.

"It will be a sad blow to Mrs. Kenedy and Miss Kate, and I would rather you than I, be the bearer of the sad news.

"Now, I suppose Ramsey will have all his own way."

The colonel seemed to think aloud the last words, but Sam said quickly:

"Ramsey, sir?"

"Yes, Ray Ramsey, a young ranchero who lives near the Kenedy ranch and is in love with Miss Kate, but whom the captain never liked."

Sam said nothing more, but that afternoon came across an old hunter who was mounting his horse, preparatory to leaving the fort.

Going up to him he addressed the plains veteran pleasantly, and having heard of the boy's ride alone from San Antonio, and admiring pluck, Leather Legs, as the old man was called, entered into conversation with him.

"Does I know whar ther Kenedy Ranch be, yer axes, my lad?" he said.

"Yes, Captain Luke Kenedy's ranch."

"Waal, jist so well as I does whar my head are."

"I am anxious to go there, and will pay you well if you will guide me.

"I did intend to go on alone, so as to learn to rely wholly upon myself; but the colonel tells me he saw a person at the fort here a few days ago, that I thought was in New York, and I am in a hurry to go right on to the ranch."

"I'll take yer thar."

"What do you charge?" asked Sam innocently.

"Waal, yer kin give me thankee, an' ef thet are too much, yer needn't give me nuthin'."

"But I don't wish you to do me a favor for nothing."

"Waal, I are the fort hunter, an' I are jist lightin' out now ter fetch in a leetle game.

an' jist as soon go one way as t'other, fer game hain't skeerce in these heur parts.

"So jist git yer critter an' come along, an' yer won't lose nuthin' by goin' with old Leather Legs, ef I does say it myself."

It took Sam but a short time to get his mustang, the best one of the three which he had captured from the Indians, and one that had proven a most valuable animal.

"I knows thet mustang, lad, fer it belonged ter Owl Eye, a Comanche chief, an' I guesses he are ther devil yer got, tho' settler Sloat didn't say so.

"He called thet animile Flyin' Arrer, an' thar hain't a sojer in ther fort, or a scout, as hasn't tried it on ter capter ther beast an' kill old Owl Eyes.

"Ef yer meets Injuns while yer is on thet beast, all yer hes ter do are ter run, and they hain't a-goin' ter ketch yer, you may be sartin'."

Sam was already very proud of his pretty spotted mustang, and was glad to hear Leather Legs speak so highly of him.

As they rode along together, finding that the youth was most anxious to learn all that he could, he taught him different signs, and in fact many things pertaining to prairie craft, and when they broke camp the next morning said:

"Now, leetle pard, the Kenedy ranch are jist thar, due north, some fifteen miles, so you kin find it now yerself, while I goes on my hunt.

"Good-by, an' when yer comes back ter ther fort, we'll hev another talk together."

Thanking the old hunter for all his kindness, Sam continued on his way alone, feeling more self-satisfied with his recent accumulation of prairie knowledge, and the fact that he had a mustang under him that no horse on the border had been able to catch.

CHAPTER VIII.

SAM KEEPS HIS PLEDGE.

AFTER several hours' ride Sam came in sight of a wooded hill, at the base of which stood an extensive cabin, with numerous out-buildings at one side, and a stout stockade surrounding all.

The prairie was dotted with cattle and sheep, and it was evidently the home of a wealthy ranchero.

To his surprise he saw no cowboys in charge of the herds, as had been the case with other ranches he had passed, and he rode to the stockade without meeting any one.

The gate was half open, and riding in, he beheld on the lawn fronting the large cabin a score of saddled mustangs, and noticed their riders grouped upon the piazza.

Riding forward, he dismounted, hitched his horse and ascended the piazza before his presence was noted by any one, so great was the interest felt by the group of men, whom he now saw were cowboys, at what was going on within.

Then they turned, and seemingly with the instinct of danger, dropped their hands upon their revolvers.

But seeing before them only a handsome boy, slender as a girl, and apparently bent on no mischief, they let go their pistol-butts, and one said:

"Waal, pard, hev you come ter ther weddin', too?"

"What wedding?" quickly asked Sam.

"Ther cap'n's darter ter ranchero Ramsey."

Instantly Sam sprung forward, edged his way through the surprised crowd, and gazed into the window, just as a maiden entered the room, leaning upon the arm of an elderly lady.

The room was large and comfortably furnished, for that far-away location, and in it were four persons:

The maiden before spoken of, and a beautiful girl she was, hardly more than eighteen; the elderly lady, evidently her mother; a man whose appearance indicated his calling as a missionary on the border, and a young and strikingly handsome man.

But the faces of the two ladies were extremely sad as they entered the room, while that of the young man was seemingly joyous.

"Now come before me with the lady, Mr. Ramsey, and I will perform the ceremony," said the minister.

The young and handsome man whom he addressed turned and said, speaking to the cowboys gazing in the open windows:

"Come in, boys, won't you?"

"I'll come in, Mr. Ray Ramsey, and if you move I'll kill you!"

As agile as a cat Sam sprung into the window, and his revolver covered the heart of the intended bridegroom.

The two ladies uttered a cry of alarm, the itinerant parson raised his hands and his spectacles in amazement, and there was a hum of surprise ran through the group of cowboys, while the intended bridegroom turned deadly pale.

But he hissed forth:

"Who is this mad youth? Seize him, boys!"

Sam sprung backward against the wall, and still covering the bridegroom, cried hastily:

"I am not mad, but was sent here by Captain Luke Kenedy to prevent that man from marrying his daughter.

"Here, madam, I have your husband's

watch, money and papers which he sent you, and that man is his murderer."

"Accursed liar," shrieked Ray Ramsey, and he sprung toward Sam, but dropped at the flash of his pistol, and lay as though dead.

To describe the scene that followed would be impossible, for a dozen cowboys threw themselves upon Sam and he was bound securely with a celerity he had not deemed possible.

As for Mrs. Kenedy and Kate they were dumb with surprise, grief and doubt; but the maiden was the first to regain her presence of mind, and she said, as she approached Sam:

"You have made a severe charge, young man, against Mr. Ramsey, and—"

"And I can prove it, miss, if you'll make these men unbind me, and let me show you the papers and things given me by your dying father.

"They surely are not afraid of a boy."

"Unbind him, Jack," said the maiden, addressing one of the cowboys, who just then came in, from having, with others, borne Ray Ramsey into an adjoining room.

"Now, sir, what proof have you?" asked Kate Kenedy, who was very pale, but calm.

"Well, miss, I am a Yankee boy, and I had a berth in a hotel, and there is where I met your father, the captain.

"Tired out one night, I hid in a vacant room to get some sleep, so the boys would not find me, and I woke up to find Mr. Ramsey in the room, talking to a man I knew to be a New York rough, as I had often seen him round.

"Mr. Ramsey was dressed in sailor clothes, and he had plotted with the other man to kill and rob your father, and hid in a closet, when the captain came to the room, invited there by the New York sport.

"I was under the bed and I heard all, and I tried to save your father, miss, when he came in, but I was too late, for Mr. Ramsey drove his knife in his back; but I killed the New York rough, and as your father drew a pistol, Mr. Ramsey ran out of the room and locking the door on the outside escaped.

"Well, miss, your father lived for some hours, and he told me that Ramsey wanted to marry you, but he did not like him, and he didn't think you did; but that your mother wished you to become his wife.

"He said hard stories were told of Ramsey, and that he was plotting to make you his wife, as he had heard of a large fortune left you by an uncle in New York, and which your father had gone on to New York to see about.

"He knew that Ramsey had followed him to New York to kill him, and then return

and marry you, and your father begged me to prevent it, and I swore to him I would, and I have done so.

"Now here is his watch, belt of money and papers, miss, which he told me to give your mother with his dying blessing for you and for her, miss."

Sam, as he finished speaking took off the heavy buckskin belt he wore under his hunting-shirt, and which contained the watch, chain, money and papers left by Captain Kenedy, with a statement of the coroner, and the burial expenses of the unfortunate Texan.

"Mother," and Kate Kenedy's voice was strangely calm. "I hope your eyes are now open to the wickedness of Ray Ramsey, and I have to thank this brave youth for saving me from a marriage to a man I never loved, and whom I was going to marry to please you, believing his false story of how kind he had been to poor father in New York, when he had been struck down by a midnight robber."

"But the letters, signed by your dying father, Kate?" urged the weeping mother, hard to convince that her idol had been shattered.

"If he brought you any letters, Mrs. Kenedy, from your husband, he forged them, for I held the captain's hand when he died, and all I tell you can be proved by the New York papers I have in my saddle-bags, though the name of the assassin was not known, and Captain Kenedy only told me who he was.

"I recognized him as the man in the sailor suit, whom I saw kill the captain, as soon as I saw him standing there, and I am not sorry that I killed him."

"Yer didn't kill him, young feller," said the cowboy, Jack, just then coming into the parlor.

"What do you mean?" cried Kate Kenedy.

"Waal, Miss Kate, I has allus thought Ramsey were slip'ry as a snake, so when I heerd ther tale o' thet young 'un I jist went ter see if he were really dead, an' I didn't find him lyin' on ther bed whar we left him.

"But he hed lit out."

"Escaped?" cried Mrs. Kenedy and her daughter in a breath.

"Yas'm; the blood are thar on ther pillar, what bled from his head, an' he hev gone."

"Then pursue and capture him, for the murderer of my father shall not go unpunished," cried Kate.

"But, Kate—"

"Mother, will you still be blind to that man's deviltry?"

"Remember, you nearly sacrificed me to my father's murderer."

"He came here with falsehoods of how he had nursed father in his dying hours, and brought letters he said my father had written, begging me to at once become his wife, and all of us go on to New York to get my fortune."

"Now in my mind there is no doubt, for this brave boy brings proof, and he has nothing to gain by falsehood, while, if Ray Ramsey were not guilty, he would not have fled as he has."

Mrs. Kenedy could no longer remain blind to the truth of the accusations against Ray Ramsey, and now convinced of his guilt, the two urged a hot pursuit of the fugitive.

But Jack, the cowboy chief, and a dozen of his men were already upon the fugitive's trail, and every hope was entertained of his early capture and punishment, and that meant a sudden drop from a limb at the end of a rope for Ray Ramsey.

CHAPTER IX.

TREACHEROUS PARDS.

To the regret of all, excepting the fugitive, the cowboys returned at night to the ranch, having been unable to find any trace of Ray Ramsey after reaching the river.

Unwilling to leave the ranch long without its full quota of protectors, as the Indians had been most troublesome of late, Jack, the cowboy chief, had turned homeward with his comrades, to report their want of success.

They found that Sam had in the mean time quite won his way to the heart of Mrs. Kenedy and Kate, to whom he had more minutely told all that had happened, and of his trip to Texas.

They wanted to reward the youth for all he had done for them, but he refused their kind offers of money.

Then Mrs. Kenedy decided to at once leave the ranch in the care of Jack Carrol, making him her agent, and start for New York with her daughter, where, with the fortune left Kate, they need no longer live upon a border ranch, subject to every danger.

Sam was asked to return with them to New York, Mrs. Kenedy telling him she would adopt him as a son; but he was firm in his determination to remain in Texas, and told her he had left a good home and kind parents to come to the South-west, and was determined to make a name for himself.

He, however, said he would accompany them to Austin, from whence they could go by stage to Galveston, while he returned to his cabin near Mission San Jose.

An ambulance and wagon were accordingly gotten ready for the road, and the following day Mrs. Kenedy, Kate, Sam and a guard

of eight cowboys from the ranch started for Austin, and arrived there without adventure.

There the ladies took the stage for Galveston, and the cowboys turned back for the ranch, while Sam set out in company with three Texas cattle-men, so they called themselves, for San Antonio.

The very first camp they made Sam felt he had made a mistake in going with strangers, and wished that he had started alone, for he did not like the looks, actions or conversation of the men.

They seemed to regard him in a strange way, and several times he caught them whispering together suspiciously, which excited his fears for his safety.

The face of one of the men seemed strangely familiar, and yet he could not recall where he had seen it before, but he was impressed with the idea that it had not been under pleasant circumstances.

He had met the three men at the hotel in Austin and heard them say they were going to San Antonio, and had asked to join them, a request which they readily granted.

At first they had seemed anxious to treat him most kindly, and then, after being several hours on the trail, their manner toward him began to change, until when they camped for the night they were rude and disagreeable toward him.

Sam pretended not to notice this change, but kept his eyes and ears wide open, and was determined at the first opportunity he would desert such unpleasant company.

He made an excuse to get off and shoot a prairie chicken for supper, but the man whose face seemed familiar said abruptly:

"We don't want no prairie chicken, an' 'tain't good fur leetle children to eat, so set ter work an' build up a fire an' I'll br'ile some venison, an' ef yer don't like thet, then yer kin go hungry."

"All right; I like venison," said Sam, cheerily, and he soon built a fire, and seeing now that it was dark and that two of the men were playing cards, while the third was busy cooking, he determined to make an effort to escape, for he had become more than ever convinced that there was mischief brewing toward him, for suddenly the recognition of that face flashed upon him.

When he had seen it several months before it had been beardless, and the hair was short; now the hair was quite long, and a beard and mustache disguised the man almost beyond recognition.

"Yes, it is the cowboy whom Joe and I hit with the bull-whip, and he swore to get even with me; but I guess I'll skip and save Mr. Bob Burt, as Injun Granger called him, the chance of wiping me out."

He pulled up his scrape and rifle quietly and moved toward his horse, and quickly had the saddle upon him.

But ere he could mount his foe rushed upon him, crying out:

"Not so fast, youngster, for I owes you a leetle debt I wishes to pay. Come, boys!"

The last was to his two comrades, who also came rushing toward the spot.

Had it not been for Flying Arrow shying violently, as Bob Burt ran up, Sam could have thrown himself into the saddle and risked the chance of escape.

But the horse jerked him almost down, and he barely had time to draw his revolver as Bob Burt rushed upon him.

But he did have time, and just time, to pull trigger, and the revolver exploded just as the cowboy was upon him.

A yell of fury and pain burst from the lips of Bob Burt, and he threw himself upon the boy in perfect frenzy; but the hands did not close, and his heavy, dead weight dragged Sam to the ground, just as the other two men ran up and seized him.

"Waal! he hev done fer our pard, thet are a fact," cried one, as he saw that Bob Burt had ceased to breathe.

"Ef he hes ther money about him thet feller told us he hed, I guess we'll do for him; ef not, we'll carry him on to San Antone an' let the boys ter string him up, even ef he be young, an' I guess it'll make us solid with 'em down thar, as thet gerloot were from thar."

All this Sam heard, but he said nothing, while his captors searched and robbed him of his money, which was not much, and then securely bound him, after which they buried the body of Bob Burt and lay down to sleep with the indifference of men born without the shadow of a conscience.

CHAPTER X.

CLOSE QUARTERS.

As Sam had anticipated, he returned to San Antonio, but not as he wished by any means, for he went there as a prisoner.

The two men who took him there at once made known to the cowboys at the Moodie House, where they put up, that Sam had left Austin in company with three of them, but had risen at night, when in camp, robbed their comrade, and was making his escape when Bob Burt gave chase and was shot by the youngster.

This at once infuriated all against Sam, and in less than half an hour there were several who swore that they new him well, and that he was a girl in boy's clothing, and had come from Galveston.

Others said he was a horse-thief from the

Rio Grand, and all united in saying that he should be hanged for his crime.

All this looked very blue for poor Sam, and for awhile his nerve almost failed him, and not without great cause, for he was a boy amid several score of wild reckless men, with fearful charges made against him.

Sam appealed to them to give him a chance to prove he was not what they said, and to take him to parties in town who had seen him when he was there before, and could prove that Bob Burt had attacked him then without cause, and swore to be revenged because he had gotten square with him, through the kindness of Injun Granger.

But they would not listen to him, and, inflamed with liquor dragged him out of the hotel to string him up.

Then indeed did Sam gaze wistfully around, and seeing no friendly face in the angry crowd, gave himself up as lost.

The moon was shining brightly, and there was a tree near by selected as the gallows, and which had been graced on many former occasions by a like cruel scene.

Toward this the youth was dragged, a lariat around his neck, and a man had just climbed up in the branches to put one end over a stout limb, when three persons suddenly appeared upon the scene who were not of the angry crowd.

Two of them were men and the third was a youth about the age of Sam.

All of them carried revolvers in each hand and the weapons were seen, by the bright moonlight to be cocked.

"Pards, the night is no time for an execution, and besides there can be none in this town unless a jury and judge so decides against a criminal," said one of the men in loud, distinct tones.

His words checked the acts of the lynchers and a dozen voices spoke his name aloud;

"Injun Granger!"

"Yes, pards, I am Injun Granger, and that is my boy pard you have there, and the man who hurts a hair of his head answers to me, so now go on with your hanging."

"They are but two, for the boy don't count, so don't let 'em bully you," cried one of the two men who had brought Sam to San Antonio as a prisoner.

"Waal, ef you makes up yer mind that Old Leather Legs don't count in a scrimmage, yer makes a awful mistake, an' I w'u'd be pleased ter hev yer sail in with ther hangin' jist ter conterdict yer."

"As fer ther boy, heur, thet are his pard, an' I'm thinkin' yer'll find him wuss nor a she jaguar ef yer hurts leetle Sam," said Leather Legs, the Hunter of Fort San Saba, for he it was with Injun Granger and Joe Booth.

Though the two men from Austin did not know either Injun Granger or Leather Legs, not so with the San Antonio cowboys, for they did know both men, and were aware of all they could do, so they made no movement further to hang the youth.

"What is it all about, Sammy, for I didn't know you were in town, until Joe came running down to the camp, and said he had seen you in a peck of trouble up at the Moodie House, and Leather Legs here, my old pard, who was taking supper with me, just came along to see fair play.

"What is it Sammy?" and Injun Granger turned to Sam, who said quietly:

"It's all about Bob Burt, whom I did not recognize in Austin, and who put up a job with these two fellows to kill and rob me."

"Bob Burt was it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is he?"

"Dead."

"Who killed him?"

"I did."

"Good! what about?"

"I did not recognize him at first, as his hair and beard had grown out; but the first night we camped I saw there was going to be trouble for me, so I started to light out, when Bob Burt ran on me and I shot him.

"Then these two rascals robbed me, and brought me here as a prisoner, but they gave themselves away by their talk, and I found out that Burt had got them to play a game to kill and rob me, telling them I had plenty of money."

"You met them in Austin, you say, Sammy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, pards, this is all clear enough that there should be a hanging, only you've got the wrong one to string up.

"There's your game!"

As Injun Granger spoke he threw his revolvers up to a level and covered the two treacherous rascals, whose lies had so nearly cost Sam his life.

They attempted to draw their weapons, but the fickle crowd was too quick for them, and in an instant they were seized, bound, and dragged up to the same tree selected for Sam's summary execution, while Injun Granger said calmly:

"We do things well here, Sammy, as you see.

"Now come, and we'll get your money back from those corpses, and your horse and arms, which you say they have at the Moodie House."

As they walked away Sam and Joe chatted gayly together, for the latter had become most anxious at his pard's long absence, and had that day come into San Antonio to see if

he could learn anything regarding him, and was fortunate enough to find him, and in deadly danger too.

"You saved me that time, Joe, and are even with me for the time I dragged you out of the creek in old Massachusetts," said Sam, as once more in possession of his horse and weapons, the boys were riding out of town that night, to their little ranch on the river, some miles distant from San Antonio.

CHAPTER XI.

NOCTURNAL VISITORS.

To say that Sam was delighted to again get back to the companionship of Joe, would be to draw it mildly, for he was overjoyed, and as the two rode along together on the way to the ranch, he told his pard of all his adventures, and was listened to with an attention and interest that was most gratifying.

At last the two friends approached their cabin, and Joe had his surprise for Sam, as he had already cut down quite a number of trees, and done a vast deal of work for a youth, to add to the improvement of the place.

As they rode into the clearing their ears were suddenly greeted with a series of what appeared to be the wildest shrieks, followed by the rapid discharge of firearms, then groans, and a terrific racket; all coming from within the cabin.

"The ranch is full of Injuns, Joe," yelled Sam, adopting the western pronunciation of I-n-d-i-a-n, which cut it down to Injun.

Instantly he drew rein and a revolver at the same time.

"You're right, Sam; but we'll fight 'em," answered Joe valorously.

But before they could say more there was a sudden crashing of wood and the door of the cabin, which opened inward, was split in two, and out came one then another, a third, fourth and fifth of the largest wild hogs the boys had ever seen.

"Good Lord!" said Sam.

"Holy crickets!" gasped Joe.

Then followed several shots from the boys' revolvers, and three of the hogs dropped, while the remainder scampered away squealing savagely and disappeared in the chaparral.

Dismounting quickly the boys went to the cabin and surveyed the ruin, for the door was split in pieces, and a torch thrown in the fire soon revealed a wreck within.

The store chest had been upset and the contents devoured, the beds had been overturned, and a belt of pistols had been knocked down and rooted into the fire, and this had caused the firing which had alarmed the boys and terrified the hogs, while a large tin box

of red pepper had been overturned and getting into the noses and eyes of the brutes, had made them squeal and grunt with pain, and, adding to their alarm at the firing had caused them to dash pell-mell at the door and make a hasty exit.

In spite of their loss, and the wreck left by the hogs, the boys sat down and made the cabin ring with laughter at the comical occurrence, and thus put in good humor soon collected their bedding and retired to rest, not even in their dreams disturbed by the nocturnal visitors.

CHAPTER XII.

A GUARDIAN ANGEL.

THE morning following the raid of the wild hogs, Joe mounted a mustang, and leading another, started up to San Antonio for a fresh supply of stores, while Sam remained behind to keep house and get things to rights.

This he soon accomplished, and then he sat down to meditate upon future prospects.

He had sold one of the Indian ponies to the settler whose family he had saved, for twenty dollars, and he had as much more money paid him by Injun Granger for his services, and double that amount left from his own savings, and he knew Joe had about fifty dollars.

The money intrusted to him by Captain Kenedy he had religiously accounted to Mrs. Kenedy for every dollar of, and would not accept from her the slightest compensation, saying that the passage of himself and Joe out to Texas was ample compensation for what he had done.

With their little fortune combined, Sam thought it would be best to make a start in the cattle business, while he and Joe could trap for furs, kill bear, deer, buffalo and other game for their skins, and perhaps capture a few ponies from the Indians, which would give them a good start in life.

Having come to this conclusion as to what was best to be done, Sam decided to practice a feat of horsemanship he had frequently seen performed by the Texans, with seemingly the greatest of ease.

This was to ride at a full gallop, toss his sombrero far ahead, and swooping down from the saddle pick it up without checking the speed of his horse.

It looked easy, and Sam mounted Flying Arrow and made the attempt.

What success he met with he did not learn for an hour after, as he fell upon his head with such force that it stunned him, and there, lying like dead upon the prairie, Joe found him shortly after as he came back from San Antonio.

To spring from his mustang and carry Sam to the river bank was an instant's work.

and finding he was not wounded, or killed, as he at first feared, he dashed water in his face and revived him.

At first Sam was bewildered, but at last recalled his attempted feat and said dolefully:

"I didn't do it, did I Joe?"

"Do what?"

"Pick up my hat?"

"Your hat is off on the prairie," said Joe, thinking Sam's mind was wandering.

"I know it, and that's what gave me the tumble, for I was trying to pick it up at a gallop."

"Oh, Sam, you'll kill yourself yet."

"My head's too hard, Joe, and I bet it made a hole in the prairie where it hit."

"I guess Arrow must have shied, for I went off mighty easy."

"And you stayed there mighty easy too, for I thought at first you were dead."

"I verily believe, Sam, that—"

"That what, Joe?" asked Sam as his pard hesitated.

"That Felice has kept her dying promise and is your guardian angel, for you certainly escape every danger."

Sam's face clouded at the remembrance of the beautiful girl whose life he had saved, and over whose dead body he had read the burial service, and rising to his feet abruptly he said:

"It may be, Joe, and it doubtless is her spirit that guards me, and I have no fear of anything now."

"I guess she wasn't round when the wild hogs rooted our cabin, and—"

"Sh—Joe, don't laugh at anything so sacred as the thought that poor Felice keeps me from harm."

"I don't laugh at it, Sam, for I believe she is your guardian angel, and if I had one too, I'd be the most reckless boy alive, for I would expect to escape any danger."

"But come, let us put away the stores I brought, and—"

"Hark! hear that firing," cried Sam.

Both listened attentively, and from down the river came the sound of firing, and mingled with it wild war-cries they well knew were uttered by Indians.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BOY TRAILERS.

BELOW on the river, and a little over a mile away from the home of the two youths, were the cabins of two settlers, who were trying to gain a living by farming and raising cattle.

The men were industrious and kind-hearted fellows, and devoted friends, who had come to Texas to cast their fortunes together.

Their families consisted of their wives, and

three children each, and both Sam and Joe knew that the firing and war-cries they heard came from the cabins of the two settlers.

Had they had any doubt on this score it was set aside by seeing a negro riding by at full speed, and who called out:

"Dem Injuns is jist killin' all de fokes at dem cabins down de ribber."

They recognized the negro as one that belonged on a ranch above them, and Sam called out:

"How many Injuns are there?"

"Dar mout be a t'ousand, but I only seen seben."

"Then come back with us, for we can beat off that many."

"No, boss, I hain't huntin' Injuns now, but I tell 'em above on de ribber fer you, an' I guesses the cowboys will come."

Away went the frightened negro once more, as fast as his pony could carry him, and Sam turned to Joe and said earnestly:

"Joe, we must see what we can do."

"Yes, Sam."

"Come."

Five minutes after the two boys were flying along the river bank, mounted upon their mustangs.

The firing and the war-cries had ceased a short while before, and yet they knew well the reason, for great volumes of smoke rolled heavenward from the midst of the timber, showing that the cabins had been set on fire by the red fiends.

The next moment the brave boys dashed into the clearing, and the sight that met their gaze was heart-rending, and made them reel in their saddles with sudden weakness.

The two cabins were on fire and burning furiously, and the two settlers lay before their own doors, riddled with arrows, dead and scalped.

Near them, here and there, were their wives and children, with the scalp-lock torn from the head of each.

But one of the mothers yet lived, though she was sinking fast, and Sam hardly heard her faint call.

Instantly he was kneeling by her side and heard her whispered words:

"They were seven in all—Comanches.

"My husband killed two, and their comrades threw the bodies into the river.

"They left us as you see, sacked our homes and carried off the plunder on our own ponies; but, worst of all, they have carried with them my daughter, my poor Lucy, and what will not be her fate?"

"We will try and save her," said Sam, boldly.

"God bless you! but go at once, or you will be too late."

"And you?"

"Leave me to die, for I will soon be out of suffering; but save my poor child."

Sam turned away, as the eyes closed wearily, and mounting his mustang once more, he and Joe rode rapidly away.

Put to the test to follow a trail, Sam soon proved that the lessons he had received from Injun Granger and Leather Legs, not to speak of his own experience, such as it had been, now served him well, for he trailed the red-skins with a rapidity that would have surprised an old scout.

Going at a sweeping gallop, it was not long before they came in sight of the Indian raiders over a distant roll of the prairie.

There were five mounted warriors, and two of these were leading fully half a score of ponies, laden down with plunder taken from the cabins.

The other three were driving a few loose ponies and half a hundred head of cattle before them, and they were urging them forward at a pace as fast as they could travel.

"There they are, Joe, and we can do but one thing," said Sam.

"What is that?"

"Follow them until dark and wait for them to camp, and then go for them for all we are worth."

"They are five, Sam, and we but two."

"They won't know how many we are, and we'll make them think there are more of us."

"Now let us keep out of sight, so they won't suspect they are being pursued, and wait for night."

"Do you see the captive, Sam?"

"Yes—one of the warriors is holding her in front of him; but he won't hold her long if we have our way."

And following the Indian trail, though keeping out of sight, the boys kept on untiringly until night settled down upon the prairie.

CHAPTER XIV.

TWO AGAINST FIVE.

WHEN Sam determined to pursue the Indian marauders and murderers, he felt that if he and Joe could recapture the maiden, and put the Indians to flight, it would be a great feat for them to perform.

Whether the red-skins knew of the scarcity of men in that part of the country at the time, or were reckless enough to be indifferent to pursuit, is not known; but certain it is that they went into camp that night with seeming little dread of attack.

Sam took in their camping-place well, and then said:

"Joe, I guess they'll keep two on duty over the cattle, and the other three will stay in the timber and guard the girl, so I'll tell you what we'll do."

"Well, Sam," said the ready Joe.

"You come with me and find out just where the cattle guards are, for they'll not be together.

"Then I'll leave you near one of them to kill him when you hear my shot in the timber."

"But, Sam—"

"Hold on, Joe, for you must hear my plan.

"You must lariat your pony near you, and have a bead on the Injun guard, waiting my shot.

"When he drops the other will run to his aid for you must give the Comanche war-cry after you kill him, and you will see him before he does you, so just knock him over too."

"I'll do it."

"Then get on your pony and start the cattle back toward home."

"And you, Sam?"

"I'll have my pony near me, and get close in to the camp-fire and pick my Injun, and then with a yell will run in on the other two, and I ain't afraid of not hitting them.

"They'll hear your shot follow mine, and think there are a number of whites after them and stampede."

"Suppose they don't stampede?"

"Then it's got to be a fight between us, and I'll have the advantage in surprising them.

"If they get too hot for me, I'll call Flying Arrow and skip after you."

"But the girl?"

"That's what I am most anxious about, to save her.

"They may kill her at my shot, but I'll try and be too quick for them.

"Now, Joe, remember my shot is the signal.

"You have two Injuns to get away with, and the cattle to capture, and I have three reds and the girl."

"I'll be on hand, Sam, and am ready now," was Joe's reply, and the boy pards crept nearer and nearer to the camp, which was designated by a small fire, and soon got the situation well in their minds.

The stolen cattle were feeding upon a small prairie in a valley, and they were kept from roving by two mounted Indian guards upon two sides, while upon a third was the camp in a small copse of timber.

Sam certainly had diagnosed their plan well.

"Here's your place, Joe, and you see yonder red isn't a hundred yards away," he said, as the two boys glanced up from a ravine and saw the Indian herder only a short distance off, sitting on his horse.

"The other one is up the valley, and that is the way you must drive the cattle.

"Get 'em to going once, and if you don't see the other Injun, he can't stop 'em I'll bet high."

"I can pick off that one, never fear, Sam, and then I'll lay for the other, so give me the signal when you please."

"All right; good-by," and Sam stole away down the ravine to where he had left his horse and the one belonging to Joe.

Mounting his own mustang, he rode cautiously away toward the clump of timber where he saw the glimmer of fire, and there came floating toward him the odor of broiling meat.

"That makes me hungry," he muttered, and added:

"I'll hurry up so as to get their supper."

Before him he saw several ponies lariat upon the prairie, and which he knew were the animals ridden by the red-skins.

Then he dismounted and let Flying Arrow loose, but with a command to remain where he left him.

The intelligent mustang stood like a statue, and Sam moved cautiously on toward the timber.

Now he was in his element, for just such scenes of danger and daring he had read about, and now he was the chief actor in a rescue of a maiden from cruel red-skins.

On he went until he saw three forms moving about the fire, and sitting with her back against a tree, and a lariat binding her to it, was the young girl who had been cruelly torn from her home.

Her head was bowed and she seemed either asleep, or, from grief, utterly oblivious to all that was going on around her.

Presently one of the warriors approached her with something in his hands.

"He's offering her some supper," muttered Sam, and he raised his rifle as though to fire.

But getting down upon his hands and knees, he crept nearer and nearer, until he was not thirty paces distant.

Then he decided to fire, and lying flat upon the ground, to get a perfect aim, he selected the one that he was to kill.

It was the largest of the three, and with a chief's feathers in his hair.

He stood apart from the other two, who were busily eating, and was talking to the captive, who had raised her head and was gazing straight at him.

The aim being satisfactory to Sam, his finger touched the trigger, and the flash and report followed.

Dead ere he touched the ground, fell the chief, and rightly supposing that the others' eyes would be momentarily blinded by the

firelight and prevent their seeing him, Sam sprung to his feet and rushed forward, uttering a series of wild yells and calling out to imaginary comrades to follow him.

Ere he had gone five steps, far off on the prairie was heard the crack of a rifle, followed by a yell, and Sam knew that Joe was at work, and only hoped his aim had been as true as his own.

To say that the two red-skins were astounded would be to express it mildly, for they sprung to their feet at the crack of the rifle and fall of their comrade, and one of them, drawing a tomahawk, sent it flying at the head of the maiden.

Fortunately she saw the act and moved her head quickly, and it buried itself in the trunk of the tree within an inch of her ear.

As he threw the weapon Sam fired with his revolver, and the red-skin dropped upon one knee, while his comrade bounded away like a deer into the deeper recesses of the timber.

Rushing upon the wounded savage, who arose and faced his foe, Sam fired rapidly as he ran, and received an arrow in return in his shoulder.

But the wound did not check him, and he still ran on his foe, and by a well-aimed shot brought him again to the ground, for he saw that he was unable to run, his leg being shattered at the knee.

The fury of his nature was still paramount, however, in the breast of the savage, for he tried to drag himself quickly to the tree and drive his knife in the heart of the young girl.

But Sam thwarted him, and he turned upon him like a dying snake, when within his own length of the captive.

Half rising, he held up his knife to fight it out, when, by a fourth shot, Sam sent a bullet through his brain.

At that instant a rifle crack was heard off on the prairie, and then came in Joe's ringing voice:

"Ho, Sam! all O. K. out here."

Sam shouted back that all was lovely with him, and severing the lariat that bound the girl, hurried her off on the prairie toward where he had left Flying Arrow, and where were the Indian ponies, for he expected a shot from the red-skin who had fled.

But that savage had struck for the village of his people, evidently believing scores of foes were upon his track, and when Sam, having placed the young girl on Arrow, called out to Joe, he learned that the second red guard had also escaped, though Joe felt sure he had wounded him, as he saw him reel at his shot.

The young girl was most profuse in her thanks for her rescue, and told Sam she in-

tended killing herself as soon as she found out there was no chance of escape for her.

Remembering the words of the old Texan, that "an Injun hain't dead until he is scalped," Sam and Joe both "took the hair" of their red foes, and then, as the cattle were already on the back trail, followed on after them, and at dawn met a party of Captain Burleson's rangers in pursuit of the Indians.

The gallant Texans gave the boy pards three rousing cheers for their daring and successful work, and the captain said to Sam:

"Young as you are, my boy, when you want to become a ranger, let me know."

The poor young girl was taken care of by the Catholic Sisters of San Antonio, and both found themselves heroes in the eyes of even the oldest plainsmen.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BOY RANGER.

THE remark of Captain Burleson set Sam to thinking that it would be a good thing if he could become a Texas Ranger, while Joe could remain on the ranch, hire a cowboy to help him, and keep the stone of their fortune rolling.

He was afraid Joe would object, so he determined not to ask him, but to first join the company and then tell him, urging that he should remain as a ranchero.

Captain Burleson was away when he arrived, but he boldly made his desire known to the officer in charge and the men.

He was laughed at, for though all had heard of his exploit, there were many men who felt that a boy had no right among veterans such as they were.

"How old are you, youngster?" asked the lieutenant.

"Seventeen, sir, in two months."

"If you join the Rangers you'll never reach it," said one.

"Do your parents know you are in Texas?" asked another.

"Yes, for I wrote them."

"How much do you weigh, bud?"

"Ninety pounds."

At this there was a general laugh, for there was not a man present that did not double Sam's weight.

"Oh, I'm good, what there is of me," said Sam, checking his anger.

"You'd make a better gal than yer does a boy, with yer slender figger, rosy face and black eyes," remarked an old Ranger.

"What can you do?"

The question was asked in a slighting tone, and Sam's reply was quick and to the point:

"I can out-run, out-ride, out-jump, out-

shoot, out-sleep and out-eat any man in this land for stampes or horses, and the one that doubts it has but to put up his money or mustang or shut up."

A perfect yell of hilarity burst forth at this plucky assertion, and one old Texan said:

"Boy, jumpin' are my strong hold, an' thar are my pony ag'in' yourn as I kin beat yer."

"Done!" said Sam, "if it's a run and jump."

"That's what it are ter be."

A line was drawn and the Texan ran about briskly for awhile, as though to warm up his joints, which nearly three-score years were beginning to stiffen a little.

He had held the palm as the best leaper in the company, and he was not to be outdone by a boy.

It was to be decided by two jumps, one of distance and the other in height.

The Texan went back thirty paces, took a start and cleared the back of a small mustang, though one foot tripped lightly and he fell on the other side.

Then Sam shot away from the mark like an arrow from the bow, went up into the air, cleared the back of the mustang by a foot, and came down like a cat on his feet.

"Len ther Leaper beat at his own game!" yelled a voice, and three cheers were given for the boy.

It was evident that the Leaper was surprised, and for the straight jump he exerted himself to the utmost and made a beautiful leap, while Sam came close on his heels and added five inches to the distance made.

"Thet are your mustang, my lad, for you has won him squar'," said Len, with no ill-feeling.

"Now for the race," called out the lieutenant, and in this a score of Rangers were the participants.

The distance was one hundred and fifty yards, to start at the word "Go," and the first one across the line was to take the lot of mustangs, for each man put one up to form a pool for the winner, and each one had hopes of winning Sam's famous Flying Arrow.

"Going to put Black Cloud up, Martin?" asked the lieutenant of a Ranger, whose horse, Black Cloud, was known to have no superior.

"Not for this foot-race. I'll risk him against the boy's mustang, if he don't lose him now, and then I'll have the two fastest horses on the border," said Martin.

"Or I will," put in Sam, who overheard the remark.

The Rangers laughed, and the twenty-three racers took their places, the word was

given by the lieutenant, and quick as a flash of lightning Sam was at full speed before the others were fairly started.

Many stopped, for they considered it a foregone conclusion that they could not win.

But others held on in hopes that the boy would break down.

Yet his wiry frame showed no sign of failing, and he crossed the goal far ahead of any of his competitors, and coolly remarked:

"If I don't join the Rangers I'm twenty-four horses in by this pleasant visit, anyway, and I think I'll call often."

Those who had not joined in the race yelled with delight to see the boy win, and called for the next test, which was to be horsemanship.

But Sam's face did not pale at this, as it would have done some time before, for, since the day he fell on his head, he had practiced constantly all kinds of tricks from the back of his horse.

At his old Massachusetts home he had been able to ride standing up on a horse when the animal was in a gallop, and now he seemed to feel no dread of the result.

"All who enter must stake a pony," said the lieutenant, who was anxious for Sam to win, and saw that the boy's face was full of pluck.

Horses in Texas then ranged from ten to fifty dollars apiece, and every Texan had from three to a score each, and they willingly put up an ordinary mustang in the hope that they might win, for they had confidence in their own powers of horsemanship, and could not believe that a Yankee boy, only a few months in Texas, could beat them.

There were three judges chosen from among the old men, and Sam mounted Arrow without saddle or bridle, which was the first surprise.

There was then picking up of sombreros at a gallop, which all did, Sam among the rest, in spite of having no saddle to cling to, but the mane and his cat-like tenacity served him as well.

Then Sam, after numerous other tricks had been accomplished by all, took the prize by springing to his feet and riding his bare-back mustang at a run, a feat that the Rangers could not accomplish, even though some followed the boy's example and threw aside their heavy boots.

Amid loud cheers Sam led his winnings for best horsemanship—twenty-seven mustangs—over to where his others were, and lariatied them out.

"Now I'll stake Arrow against all for a race of a quarter of a mile to five miles," cried Sam, greatly elated at his success.

The Rangers knew the celebrated Indian mustang too well to throw their ponies away

in a race with him, but all called out for "Martin and his Monterey Racer."

Martin, the man who had before spoken of winning Arrow, came promptly forward, leading Black Cloud, a handsome animal, glossy and clean-limbed.

Sam eyed him suspiciously, for he was a good judge of horseflesh, and had often heard of the famous Monterey Racer.

But he would not back down, and a race, horse for horse, one mile distance, was agreed upon.

They mounted and with three "starters" rode out upon the prairie to a tree just a little over a mile distant.

The two splendid animals bounded away evenly together, and ran head and head toward the goal, distancing the three starters, although they were well mounted.

As they came on the excitement in the camp was immense.

A string had been stretched between two stakes, which the leading horse was to break, and which would break it was a question hard to determine.

It could be seen that not an inch of advantage had either the Racer or Arrow, and the the Rangers were wild with excitement, and hope ran high for the plucky boy to win.

As they neared the goal Martin was seen to ply the spurs and also to urge Black Cloud on in any way he could.

But Sam never touched Arrow with his spurs and held his own, though he dropped back quarter of a length, which caused Martin to say, hoarsely;

"I've got you, boy."

Sam smiled, but said nothing, and the two horses came within a dozen lengths of the goal, when all saw that Black Cloud had a good neck the lead.

Then, with a yell, Sam plied the spurs, and Arrow jumped to the fore like lightning and broke the line half a length ahead of the Racer.

A wild yell broke from the Rangers, while Martin said in husky tones:

"You've won my horse, boy, and I'll give a cool two hundred for him."

"No, I don't care to sell, even for so generous an offer," and Sam gazed with pride upon his splendid black.

"How 'bout the shootin', youngster?" said an old Ranger, recalling Sam from his happy contemplations.

"What shooting, sir?"

"You said you could outjump, outrun, an' outride any o' us, you has kep' yer word squar'; but now ter see ef yer kin prove yer kin outshoot us all."

"I'll give you a trial, anyway."

"Well, you've got an eye o' fire, and ther

nerve o' a mule, an' I'm thinkin' you kin shoot.

"Eatin' puddin' they tells me, proves ef it are good, so we'll sail in an' tries yer fer one on ther shoot."

"An' I are ther champion on ther eat an' ther sleep, when yer gits ready to tackle me," said a good-faced Ranger, who was noted as the sleepest-headed man, and largest eater in the band.

Sam glanced at his large proportions and sleepy eyes, and said with a laugh:

"I guess I won't tackle you, but give in on the eat and slumber biz."

The arrangements were then made for the shooting match.

To make it interesting, each man put ten dollars into the pool, for there were two, one for rifle, and the other for revolver marksmanship, and Sam promptly planked down his money.

All of the Rangers were crack shots, and here Sam felt a little tremulous, for he saw over four-score of gallant men arrayed against him.

But Sam had practiced "trick shooting" a great deal, and it gave him this advantage, for when a Ranger shot at a stationary target with his revolver, Sam tossed up a tin cup and sent a hole through it.

Five out of the six bullets went through the cup, and this so pleased the "still target" shooters, that they readily gave him the pool, when if he had shot for dead center he would have been beaten, as he well knew.

The same game he played with the rifle, and was acknowledged the champion.

"You won yer way in as a Ranger, Sammy," said the lieutenant.

"And should have been one without proving his right to membership, by laying out the band," said Captain Burleson, who just then rode up, and heard of Sam's exploits.

Sam was outwardly cool, but inwardly he was all excitement, and started off with his herd of ponies, and pocketful of money, to tell Joe of his good luck.

But Joe was mad at being left out in the cold, and for awhile refused to look after the ranch.

But the herd of ponies, which Sam threw in as common partnership, got him in good-humor, and he went up to San Antonio with Sam, to get his outfit complete, while he wanted to hire two herders to help him look after the increase of stock, as Sam invested most of his money in cattle.

That night Joe returned with two cowboys to the ranch, while Sam, mounted upon Black Cloud, and with Flying Arrow following, started for the camp of the Texan Riders, fully equipped as a boy Ranger.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MEETING IN DARK WATERS.

SAM had hardly become acquainted with the routine life of the Rangers' camp, when orders came from Governor Houston ordering the band to the front, and on the war-path after Indians.

They started within fifteen minutes after the arrival of the courier with the orders, and Sam rode Flying Arrow, and went armed to the teeth, while in every particular he was the most thoroughly equipped member of the band.

They struck for the Llano, and camped on its banks, for they found it a swollen torrent, which not even the brave Rangers cared to risk crossing.

But in the night comes an alarm which brings every Ranger to his feet, for cries of distress are heard far away on the other shore.

Those cries tell the fearful danger to Fort Mason, and mingling with them are war-whoops, rifle and pistol-shots.

"Men, who will try the river to aid Fort Mason?"

"Remember, I do not order you to do so, for I know my men would obey; but I want volunteers, and let no man be foolhardy enough to go unless he can fully trust his horse and can swim like a duck.

"Who goes with me?"

Thus spoke Captain Burleson, and Sam rung out in clear treble above the others:

"Count me in, cap'n."

"And me."

"I'm thar, cap'n."

"Call on me."

"Yours ter death, Cap'n Burleson."

"Don't forgit yours truly."

"Yours ter command every time, boss."

"I'm yer pard fer life everlastin'."

Such were the quaint answers of the volunteers for the desperate work, and Captain Burleson checked them off as he saw all were going to respond, and selected twenty-five of those he thought best fitted for the daring swim.

"Oh, captain! please don't leave me out," cried Sam, as he saw he was going to "get left."

"Can you swim, Sammy?"

"I swam round from New York to Indianola," was Sam's ready reply, and with a laugh the captain accepted the services of so mighty a swimmer—according to his own report; but the reader will remember that Sam was indeed a duck in the water, as he had proven when rescuing poor Felice from the waves, that night of storm on the Bahama Banks.

Sam was the first one in the fearful torrent

and Arrow took to it without the slightest urging.

The captain and others followed, so that Sam was leading the way, and as the mustang swam rapidly, Burleson called out to him to go with the current and land where he could.

Arrow was certainly a rapid swimmer, as he was a runner, and Sam soon lost sight of the others in the darkness.

Suddenly, when two-thirds across he saw a form near him.

It was certainly a man on a swimming horse.

It could not be one of his comrades, for he knew that they were behind.

Nearer came the swimming horse, and then suddenly the rider checked him, as he saw Sam, for he had been looking behind him.

There was a rapid movement of the arms, and then the twang of a bow-string, and the whiz of an arrow, while Sam's hat was turned half round on his head.

At that instant he threw his revolver forward and fired, and a wild defiant death-cry followed and an Indian warrior fell from his mustang's back into the river.

The flash was seen by the swimming Rangers behind Sam, and by those on the bank they had left, and momentarily it had lighted up the forms of the boy, with his revolver thrown forward, the Indian, rapidly setting another arrow to his bow, and the two frightened horses.

It was an instant's picture, but a fine one, and the Rangers could hardly suppress a cry of joy.

Sam caught the red-skin, just as he was disappearing, slipped his lasso around his neck, and then fastened it to the saddle it had just fallen dead from, and catching the pony turned his head toward the bank toward which he was swimming, causing him thus to tow the body of his dead rider.

A few moments after he reached the bank in safety, having avoided the floating trees, and made the gallant swim, and as the Rangers arrived one by one they found the brave boy awaiting them, the two horses standing near, and the dead Indian at his feet, his scalp in Sam's hand as a trophy.

CHAPTER XVII.

RANGERS ON THE TRAIL.

At every fresh arrival of a Ranger, Sam was congratulated upon his nerve, and the killing of the Indian, who was examined and pronounced to be a Comanche chief.

"He were a-going across on a scout, so thar must be quite a sprinklin' of 'em in ther

mischief up near their fort," said an old Ranger.

Presently, out upon the water came a cry for help, and quickly Sam was in his saddle, with several others, and swimming toward the drowning man.

He was not far away, and yet he was not found, and both horse and rider went down beneath the flood to be seen no more.

"Give me a helping hand, pard, for my pony gave out," said a voice near Sam, and he relinquished his horse to a swimmer, and swam back toward the bank, arriving at the same time that Arrow did with his tired out rider.

A gloom fell upon the party at the loss of one of their number, and Captain Burleson in counting his brave volunteers, found two men missing, and three horses.

One of the riders had died without a word in that merciless current.

"Take the Indian's pony," said Sam to the riderless Ranger, and as the animals had now gotten their wind after the hard struggle with the torrent, all mounted and dashed up toward the fort.

A sad scene met their gaze, for men, women and children were killed and scalped within a rifle's shot of the barracks, and the Comanche had escaped with their plunder.

Leaving word for the remainder of the Rangers to come on, after they got across by daylight, Captain Burleson put his best scouts ahead, and followed on after the retreating red-skins, who were loaded down with plunder, and driving a large number of cattle before them.

It was a long, hot chase, with hard fighting clear to the San Saba river, when, the balance of the Rangers having come up, with a reserve force of volunteers, ordered out by the Governor, and which company Joe Booth had joined, Captain Burleson gave the Indians battle, which resulted in victory for the Rangers, and the recapture of the stock and plunder.

But as the Comanches, even in their flight from the field, held to their prisoners, Captain Burleson took his best men and horses and pushed on after them to the Colorado river.

Here a camp was formed, and a determination made to destroy the village of Big Foot, the noted chief who had led the raid against Fort Mason Settlement, and who was also called "The Phantom Chief," as he had escaped so often in battle, and all the snares set for him.

Selecting their time, the Rangers made a dash upon the village of Big Foot, and swept through it like a gale, doing much damage, killing many warriors, and capturing the plunder of a score of raids, which was carried

back by the gallant riders to San Antonio.

But the Phantom Chief once more escaped, though many of his people fell.

Returning in triumph to San Antonio, Joe Booth was chosen auctioneer, from his glib way of talking, and sold at auction in the main plaza the booty retaken, from mules to moccasins, and robes to revolvers.

Having been in the front throughout this rapid ride, and seemed untiring by night or day, my young hero was dubbed Buckskin Sam, a name which he is known by to-day, far more than by that of Sam S. Hall.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FIGHT WITH DESPERADOES.

AFTER a short stay in San Antonio, Captain Burleson, with sixty picked men, "of whom one boy (Sam) was which," as the late lamented Artemus Ward would say, started for the Concho on a special scout.

They struck the buffalo range, finding tens of thousands of those animals feeding upon the prairie, and dashing into the herd on Black Cloud, a thoroughly trained hunter, Sam carried off the palm by killing one hundred and thirty-seven.

The Rangers then camped to jerk the buffalo meat, and feasted for a short while on juicy steaks and roasts, while their horses rested and fed on luxuriant grass that abounded near.

With steeds rested, riders ready for work, and the prospect of hard fighting ahead of them, the Rangers again start on the trail, pushing on up to Fort Belknap.

Near Belknap they went after a band of desperadoes commanded by a desperate character, said to be a Mexican officer who had deserted his army.

The Desperadoes were committing a number of lawless and murderous acts in the country, had robbed the stages, sacked ranches, and killed travelers, and the settlers were not strong enough to hunt them down, when the coming of the Rangers gave them hope that their outlaw-foes would be soon strung up.

The Desperadoes knew nothing of the arrival in the vicinity of the Rangers, until, under a guide, they dashed into their stronghold one morning at dawn, and then followed a hard fight, which ended in the killing of the greater part of them, and the stringing up of the few prisoners taken.

The daring chief however managed to escape, with a few followers, and Sam and a Ranger by the name of Tiger Bill followed hot on his trail, for he had seen the Desperado Captain shoot down, and as he then believed kill one of his best friends in the

band, and who was a nephew of General Sam Houston.

Followed hotly by Sam and Tiger Bill, and believing that other Rangers were in their rear, the Desperado Captain bade his men separate, and, in the heat of the chase, the two Ranger comrades became separated.

But Sam had his eye on the trail of the outlaw-chief, having noted the peculiar shape of his horse's hoofs, and determined to follow him on to the bitter end, for, to avenge his companion, and capture, or kill the captain would be a proud deed for him to accomplish.

Feeling that he was pursued, and not knowing by how many, the Desperado Captain held on along the Brazos, heading straight for the desert land known as the *Llano Estacado*, where he did not believe the Rangers dare follow him.

But Sam was as true on a scent as a bloodhound, and took a mental oath not to be thrown off by fear, or to give up through fatigue.

CHAPTER XIX.

LOST ON THE DESERT.

WHEN night came on, Sam held on to the trail of the Desperado Captain until he could not see it any longer, and then, as bordermen say, "camped on his trail."

With the first dawn of day he was again following it, and, in spite of every device to hide it, was not thrown off.

The horse ridden by the Desperado Captain was peculiarly shod, wearing a rough shoe on the left forefoot, and smooth shoes on the other three feet, as though he had been brought into use before he had been fully shod all round.

This enabled Sam to follow him easily, for the boy had become such an expert trailer, the Rangers looked upon him as a marvel of cunning in prairie craft.

"They'll not call me Yankee Sam for nothing, if I ferret out this trail," he muttered, as he held on his way, alluding to the circumstance of being called Yankee Sam, and Little Yank, by some of his companions in the troop.

All day he studied that trail far more diligently than he had a lesson at school, and again camped on it at night, so thoroughly unfatigued, that he was with good reason called Buckskin Sam, for his wiry frame was untiring it seemed.

Black Cloud also seemed not to show signs of fatigue, and as the trail appeared fresher, Sam felt that he must be nearing the end, for the tracks of the horse ridden by the Desperado Captain, to the experienced eyes of the young trailer, showed signs of fagging in the beast.

By noon the great sand desert, the Staked Plain, the grave of hundreds of brave men, white and red-skin alike, loomed up before Sam.

He paused at a stream to fill his canteen, take a long draught and refresh his horse, and he saw by the tracks that the Desperado Captain had done the same.

"He's about two hours ahead, I judge," said Sam, as he unhesitatingly mounted and headed out upon the sea of sand before him.

He had heard the most awful stories of that death-trap of sand, and yet before him led a trail, and where that man dared to go, he, boy though he was, would follow.

Going over a rise, he beheld before him, miles away, a horseman.

One look, and he recognized the iron-gray horse he had seen dash through the line of Rangers with a tall form on his back clad in Mexican attire, and his face hidden by a crimson mask.

The horseman looked back, saw him and drew rein.

He waited, as though for Sam to draw nearer, and then, seeing that others were not on his trail, quietly turned his horse to the right about.

It was a critical moment for Sam.

He knew he was going to measure a boy's strength, nerve and daring against a desperate man.

But he did not flinch from the ordeal.

Dismounting, he tightened his saddle-girth, looked to his arms, and remounted.

The Desperado Captain was not two miles away, and coming slowly toward him.

But in that few minutes of rest and preparation a change had come upon nature, for a sand-storm, driven by the wind, was sweeping down upon him.

With the fury of a prairie-fire it came, and to meet it Sam quickly prepared.

He turned the back of his horse toward it, and enveloped the animal's head in a blanket.

Then he wrapped around himself a serape, covering up his head, and waited.

Only an instant had he to wait, and then the sand-storm struck the horse and rider, and with a force and stinging pain upon the animal that under ordinary circumstances would have made him dash away with rage and fright.

But the intelligent animal knew his danger, and stood motionless.

For a long time the sand storm raged, and when at last the winds died down, night had come on, the heavens were overcast, and Sam felt that he must find his way back to the hills.

But the sand still scurried savagely about, and all night long the noble horse wandered, even his instinct at a loss.

With the dawn only a treeless, dried waste was visible.

The skies were clear, the wind had lulled, and the sun soon rose and beat down upon the plain.

But though the rising of the orb of day told Sam where the east lay, he knew full well that he was lost upon the Llano Estacado, and being lost upon that desert, in nine cases out of ten meant a fearful death.

Nowhere in sight was the Desperado Captain, who had led Sam into his trouble, and it was no wonder the boy murmured:

"If I die I hope he, too, will suffer all that I will have to suffer."

That was not a Christian wish, but it was sound human nature.

CHAPTER XX.

MEETING AN OLD FOE.

To dwell upon the intense sufferings of Buckskin Sam the three days he was wandering upon the desert would be only to draw a picture of the misery of a brave fellow-being and a noble heart that none would care to look upon.

His canteen of water and haversack of food Sam shared with Black Cloud, and yet there was but little nourishment for either, and the gaunt body and painful movements of the horse, and sunken eyes and haggard face of the boy, showed how bitterly both had suffered, and that the fearful strain upon them left its mark.

At last Sam spied distant timber, and urged his horse onward.

But he feared it was a hallucination, such as had come to his fevered brain before, and hardly dared hope, until suddenly Black Cloud pricked up his ears, gave a whinny of delight, and quickened up his dragging pace to a trot.

Then Sam gave a yell of joy, and an hour after horse and rider had their mouths buried in the limpid waters of a cool and rapidly running stream, while above them, to shelter their heads from the hot sun, were numerous trees thick with foliage.

Sam said, in speaking of it afterward, that he and Black Cloud drank so deeply that the stream fell an inch; but the Rangers did not believe that story, and gave the boy the credit of telling a good story when he did dodge the truth.

But they drank until satisfied, and then Sam lay down to sleep, while his horse fed upon the rich grass near by.

It was two days before Sam left that spot, which was a paradise to him, and then both himself and Black Cloud had fully recuperated, and he set off in search of himself, so to speak, for he had no idea where he was.

The day following his departure from the

stream that had saved his life, Sam came in sight of a hacienda, or ranch, and from the owner discovered where he was, and that he was not far from a small town that was as much Mexican as Texan in the habits and nationalities of its citizens.

Riding into the place, Sam went to a hotel and at once took his horse to a stable, when his eyes suddenly fell upon an iron-gray steed that riveted his attention.

The animal stood in a stall, above which hung a superb Mexican saddle and bridle.

Sam asked to have his horse put up and properly attended to, urging the request by giving a *peso* to the Greaser groom, that at once convinced him Black Cloud would not suffer, and then very coolly entered the stall of the iron-gray.

Raising his front feet he saw that the animal had been very recently shod, and in fact had not been used since the shoeing.

"Have you a good smith here?" he asked the Greaser.

"Yes, senor."

"I want my horse shod all round, and if it can be done as well as this work on the iron-gray, I'll pay extra."

"I suppose this was done here?"

"Yes, senor, only this morning."

"Is the owner of the horse here?"

"Yes, senor, at the hotel."

"Does he live here?"

"No, senor, he is a stranger, and I think an Americano."

Sam asked the stableman no more questions but entered the hotel.

As he was at supper he saw a man enter that caused him to start; but he quickly went on with his meal, and soon left the table, without attracting the attention of the person.

He went straight out to the stable to see after his horse, and found that Black Cloud had been well shod.

While examining the work he heard the Greaser say:

"There comes the senor who owns the iron-gray."

Sam looked up, caught sight of the man he had seen at the supper-table, and sprung into a stall.

The stranger entered the stable and ordered his horse saddled.

"Going away, senor?" asked the stable boy.

"Oh no, not with a fandango coming off to-night at which there will be plenty of pretty Mexican girls."

"Only going for a ride to get up a flirtation with some of the senoritas," was the reply, and the stranger mounted and rode away, saying he would return by dark.

"That man is the one who murdered Captain Kenedy in New York, and he shall not

escape me now, for he is also the Desperado Captain.

"I too will go to the fandango," muttered Sam, as he came out of his hiding place and entered into a low and earnest conversation with the Mexican stable-boy.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FANDANGO.

THE fandango, that the stranger had said he intended to attend, was one of the grandest affairs ever known in that little border town, and certainly had gathered there all the pretty señoritas of the place, and from the ranches for leagues around.

There were also present some cavaliers, army-officers, cattle-kings, cowboys and men of whom nothing was known.

In the stranger who had ridden the iron-gray horse, Sam had recognized the Desperado Captain, whose trail he had followed upon the desert, and also, the very man whom he had seen drive a knife into the back of Captain Kenedy, and whose marriage with the beautiful Kate he had thwarted just in the nick of time.

He had little dreamed that in the Desperado Captain he would find an old friend; but having done so he was determined to capture him by fair means or foul, for he looked upon him as upon a mad-dog that should have no mercy shown him.

Dressed in an elegant Mexican costume, and looking very handsome, the Desperado Captain was in his element at the fandango, when his attention was attracted to a pretty, slenderly-formed girl near him.

"Who is she?" he asked the one who had pointed her out, his eyes wandering to more beautiful faces present.

"She is the daughter of an Americano cattle king, señor, and her father is worth millions of pesos.

"She is lately out of a convent, and shy as a bird, but she wanted to see a fandango, and her father being away, she made me come with her, and I could but obey."

"You?" asked the Desperado Captain, with interest.

"Yes, señor, for I am the cowboy chief on one of her father's ranches."

"Ah! and she is rich, you say?"

"Worth millions, señor."

"What is her name?"

"Samita Hallaro, señor."

"She dresses very plainly."

"Yes, señor; but she has jewels, did she care to wear them."

"Has she any brothers?"

"No, señor."

"Nor sisters?"

"No, señor."

"She is the only heir, then, to her father's vast wealth?"

"She is, señor, and many is the young ranchero would seek her hand did he know who she was.

"But I promised not to tell, and only spoke to you, señor, because I saw you regarding her so attentively."

The Desperado Captain had been doing no such thing, but he said:

"Yes, I was struck with her very lovely face and form.

"Introduce me, please."

"Your name, señor?"

"Don Ramero."

"A Mexicano, señor?" asked the Mexican chief of cowboys.

"Yes, I am a Mexican, dwelling in Texas, as you are," said the Desperado Captain, in perfect Spanish.

"Well, Don Ramero, I will present you to Señorita Hallaro, but I must soon escort her home, for it is a long ride."

"Allow me a dance first."

"Yes, señor, if the señorita is willing, and I suspect that she is, for I have seen her regarding you attentively.

"Ah, señor, it is a fine thing to be handsome, as you are," and the Greaser sighed.

The Desperado Captain was presented to the Señorita Samita Hallaro, and instantly he became her devoted slave.

They danced together continuously, and they danced well, for she was as graceful as a gazelle.

She was well-dressed, though not richly, and wore no jewels, not even in her ears.

At last she said she must start home, for she confessed frankly she had run off to come to the fandango, and had made the cowboy chief accompany her.

She had seemed deeply impressed with the Desperado Captain, as he had been with her—money; but he also found in her a bright, pretty girl, shy but witty, and one that seemed most trusting in her innocence, and he said to himself:

"That getting lost on the desert was lucky for me, as I am not known here at all, and I shall make this girl my wife and leave this country and live on her money, for if I do not, a rope will be my end, as I can see more plainly each day.

"I can slip back to my stronghold, dig up my treasure, and with it play the wealthy American traveler and throw dust in the eyes of her old father.

"Yes, I will visit her to-morrow."

"Señor, I wish you were going home with me," said the maiden with frank innocence.

"I will do so with pleasure, if you will allow me."

"Gladly, and I will confess to my father just what I did and how I met you, and you are such a gentleman I know he will be glad to know you."

"I will have my horse gotten ready and join you."

"Oh, I am so glad, and Pedro and myself will join you at the door."

Ten minutes after the young girl rode out of the town with the Desperado at her side, and Pedro, the cowboy chief, following a few paces behind, seemingly not anxious to disturb the *tete-a-tete* of two persons who seemed to be deeply interested in each other.

CHAPTER XXII.

A SURPRISE PARTY.

MORE and more pleased with the heiress to millions of pesos, the Desperado Captain rode along with no idea as to distance, until Samita Hallaro suddenly asked him to kindly dismount and arrange her stirrup-leather, which he was glad to do.

"Permit me, senor," said Pedro, riding up quickly, as though willing to save the cavalier the trouble.

"No, Pedro, the senor understands better what to do; but you hold his horse," remarked the Senorita Samita, quietly.

Pedro at once took the rein of the horse, and the pretended Don Ramero lengthened the stirrup-leather to suit, at the same time giving the small, neatly-gaitered foot a slight squeeze.

"I am really tired, so suppose we halt for a short rest," said Senorita Samita.

It was a beautiful night, the moon shining with silvery luster, and the three halted to rest beneath the spreading branches of a live-oak tree.

Pedro led the horses aside, and Senorita Samita began to ask Don Ramero if he liked the wild life of Texas.

"And do you go armed, senor, as do others that I meet here?" she asked.

"Necessity compels it, senorita, as you will know when you have become more initiated into life outside of a convent."

"I wish I was a good shot, and I shall get you to teach me, senor, if you only will."

"With more than pleasure, senorita."

"Are yours large revolvers?"

"You shall see them."

He took two fine revolvers from beneath his jacket as he spoke and showed them to her.

"They are dangerous-looking, and I hope they are not loaded," she said, with a shudder.

"They would be useless were they not, senorita."

She took them timidly, one in each hand, and suddenly presented them at his head, while she said, sternly:

"You are my prisoner, sir."

The Desperado was surprised at her sudden act and manner, yet could not believe her in earnest, and said, deprecatingly:

"I beg you not to trifle with such deadly weapons, Senorita Samita."

"I am not trifling, my gallant Desperado Captain, *alias* Ray Ramsey."

"You are my prisoner."

He turned deadly pale, as she saw in the moonlight, and seemed about to spring upon her, and then risk a shot, when a lasso was thrown suddenly over his head and his arms were pinioned to his side, while Pedro said sternly:

"The Senorita Samita Hallaro speaks the truth, senor, for you are a prisoner."

"What means this outrage?" cried the ensnared man, in a fury.

"It is no outrage, but justice, senor," said Samita.

"Who, and what are you?" he hissed forth, glaring upon her.

"I'll answer your last question first, by saying I am a Texas Ranger, and, like you I have an *alias*, it being Samita Hallaro; but my real name is Sam Hall, also called Little Yank, and Buckskin Sam, and I am at your service."

"You, that accursed boy?"

"Yes, senor."

"You a man?"

"No, only a boy."

"It is impossible."

"Oh no, for I have played girl parts before, and am used to petticoats."

"In fact I think I make a better-looking girl than boy, especially when, as Pedro told you, I am the heiress to millions as *Sam-ita Hall-aro*."

"But I've caught you, old man, and if the Rangers don't have a jubilee over the capture of the Desperado Captain, I'm mistaken."

"I tell you it will be a surprise party all round."

"Won't it Pedro?"

"It will, Senor Sam," answered Pedro, who was none other than the Greaser stable-boy whom Buckskin Sam had taken into his service through bribery, and with his aid gotten feminine garb and so well played the part to capture his enemy.

Having gotten possession of his prisoner, the next thing was to get him in safety to the Rangers' camp, which Sam hoped to find in the neighborhood of Fort Mason or San Saba.

Having changed his feminine attire for his own clothes, which Pedro had on his horse, and put his own saddle on Black Cloud, for

the Mexican was riding it, Buckskin Sam made the Desperado Captain mount the side-saddle he had been riding, and securely bound him to it, at the same time gagging him effectually, to prevent any outcry to persons they might meet.

"Now, senor, we are ready for the road, and we'll travel by night and rest by day, to avoid trouble," said Sam, and the party moved on once more, the boy triumphant, the Mexican rejoicing over the large bribe he had received for his services, and the Desperado Captain full of revengeful and bitter thoughts against his young captor.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BORDER JUSTICE.

UNTIL after sunrise Sam continued his way toward Fort Mason, and then, afraid of meeting those to whom he could not give a correct account of his prisoner, for fear they might release him, he went into a chaparral to camp until nightfall.

The Mexican prepared breakfast, and both he and Sam partook heartily of it, but the Desperado Captain refused food.

Seeing that his prisoner was securely bound, Sam laid down near him to rest, and was soon fast asleep.

Perhaps it was instinct that awakened him, but he opened his eyes to find the Mexican cautiously severing the bonds of the Desperado Captain, who, taking advantage of Sam's being sound asleep, had offered Pedro a sum to release him, which his avaricious nature was unable to resist.

The instant Sam's eyes fell upon the startling sight he was wide awake, and his hand was upon a weapon as he half-sprung to his feet.

The Desperado Captain saw his act and cried out in warning, and with his drawn knife the Mexican turned upon the boy, while the prisoner struggled fiercely to release himself of his remaining bonds.

But the ring of Sam's pistol was the death-knell of the Mexican, and he sprung up into the air and fell upon the young Ranger with a force that knocked him down.

But he cast from him the dead body, and springing forward, thrust his revolver against the heart of the Desperado Captain, just as he had nearly succeeded in freeing himself of his bonds.

"Not so fast, old man, or a bullet will stop you," cried the young Ranger.

A muttered curse broke from the lips of the foiled man, and he submitted to be once more securely bound.

For the next two days and nights Sam did not sleep, but kept a watch on his prisoner,

and at last arrived in sight of San Naba, where, to his joy, he found several of Burleson's Rangers, who greeted him with yells of delight, and told him the entire band was encamped some twenty-five miles away, they having been sent there with dispatches.

Sam concluded not to await the time of their return, and pressed on toward Fort Mason.

He had not gone five miles, when, to his horror, he saw a band of forty Comanches coming toward him with wild yells.

Black Cloud he knew was able to leave them behind in a run, but he was leading Pedro's mustang on one side, and the iron-gray of the Desperado Captain on the other, and would be retarded in the race for life.

The mustang he could cut loose if his pace was slow; but he would swing to the iron-gray to the last.

"Come!" he cried, and the three horses bounded away together.

It was soon evident that the mustang of the dead Pedro was no match for the iron-gray and Black Cloud, and Sam quickly transferred his traps from his back to his own horse, and cut him loose.

Side by side Black Cloud and the splendid animal of the Desperado Captain ran, and it was evident that they were dropping the Comanches rapidly.

This the Desperado saw, and glancing earnestly at the pursuing Indians, who were not a quarter of a mile away, he said:

"Boy, I know that band, and they know me as an ally, and I can save you."

"I don't ask you to."

"But you will be scalped."

"Got to catch me first."

"Oh, they'll do that, for their horses are fresh."

Sam knew that they were not as fagged as was Cloud and the iron-gray, but he thought he could hold his own to Mason, and said:

"I guess not, for we are leaving them now."

"Hold, Graywolf!"

The words were addressed to the iron-gray by the Desperado Captain, and the result was a surprise to Sam, for the well-trained animal came to a sudden halt.

Furious at him for obeying his master, Sam laid the lariat upon him hard, but he obeyed the voice of his rider more than the lash, and simply reared and turned, but would not go forward once more.

Sam was in despair, for the Comanches were coming forward with renewed speed, and wild yells broke from them.

He could escape he knew; but the thought of giving up his prisoner was something he would not entertain.

Nearer and nearer came the red-skins, and

to check them Sam threw his rifle forward and fired.

Down went a pony, hurling his rider far over his head.

But it did not check the band, and the young Ranger knew it would be more than madness to stand and fight them.

But suddenly he wheeled toward his prisoner, and placing his revolver hard against his head, said savagely:

"If you don't urge your horse into a run I'll kill you."

The Desperado Captain saw that the boy meant it, and being one who believed that "while there is life there is hope," he at once spoke to his well-trained horse, and the animal bounded forward once more in a rapid run, and to Sam's joy, he saw they were gaining.

"If you try that trick again look out," he said threateningly, to the Desperado Captain who turned his head several times to look back at the Comanches.

But the Indians seemed determined not to give up the chase until Mason Barracks were in sight, and then they drew rein sullenly, just as two score gallant Rangers dashed out of a copse of timber with wild cries.

It was evidently a surprise to the Comanches, who had not believed the Rangers in that neighborhood, and they turned and fled in wild confusion.

Pursuing upon their fresh horses the Rangers gained rapidly, and determined not to be left out, Sam went to the rightabout and gave chase too, still holding firmly to the lariat that held the iron-gray.

In a short while the Rangers brought the Comanches to bay and a hot fight followed, which resulted in a complete victory for the Texans, though Sam got a wound in the leg.

After the battle the Rangers escorted Sam and his prisoner back to camp, where the boy was greeted with wild yells of welcome for he had been believed to be dead.

But when he told his story, and made known who his prisoner was, the Rangers were almost beside themselves with delight, and Captain Burleson called a trial at once for the Desperado Captain.

Of course Ray Ramsey denied Sam's charges against him; but there were others there who knew him as the ranchero who had tried to deceive Kate Kenedy, and the result was he was found guilty and sentenced to die at sunset, for the Rangers did not believe in losing time.

And at sunset he died, swung up to a tree with a lariat around his neck, and Sam fell heir to his splendid horse, weapons and traps.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MATCHING INDIAN CUNNING.

BUCKSKIN SAM returned to San Antonio after the hanging of the Desperado Captain, for he was suffering considerably from his wound.

He found Joe Booth had enlarged their ranch and added to the number of both cattle and ponies, and things looked most prosperous for the boy rancheros.

Of course Sam found himself a still greater hero in San Antonio, and, as soon as he was able, he again joined the Rangers and went with them upon a march to Wichita Mountains, and when on guard one night was attacked by a large black bear, with which he had a desperate fight, but succeeded in killing with his knife.

Sam, however, was little better than the dead bear when the fight ended, and had to be carried all the way back to San Antonio by his faithful comrades, who would not leave him to die.

But in a few weeks after his return he was again in the saddle, and had a race with a prairie-fire that nearly ended his career then and there, for his horse, the faithful Flying Arrow, was so severely burned that he had to shoot him, and the blankets he had wrapped around himself fell to pieces when his faithful, dying, straining Arrow staggered into a stream and thus saved his young master.

Nothing daunted however by the dangers he had faced, Buckskin Sam again joined the Rangers on a march into the Indian country, and one night, while on guard, played a trick on a daring Indian that was greatly applauded by the Texans.

It seems that Sam saw a red-skin cautiously creeping upon the prairie, toward the timber where he stood guarding the horses of the band, and he hid in the shadow of a tree to see what the Indian was up to.

Like a snake the savage crawled to the timber, and reaching the first horse belonging to the Rangers, severed the rope that held him to a tree, with a knife that was as sharp as a razor.

Then he went to the next, and the next, cutting each horse loose, though not one of the animals was aware of his freedom.

As the red-skin got half-a-dozen horses away, Sam followed him, and quickly tied the ends of the several ropes, thus securing the horses again, almost as fast as they were cut loose.

After the red-skin had cut the ropes of over sixty horses, he laid down in the timber and began to crawl back upon the prairie.

As he did so, Sam turned and glided toward the sleeping Rangers, a hundred paces

distant and bade them rise and follow him noiselessly.

Like shadows they followed after, and hardly had they reached the horses when a Coyote bark was heard off on the prairie, and instantly it was answered from further away.

Shortly after, dark forms were seen coming toward the timber, and half a hundred mounted warriors were visible, leading their ponies.

Nearer and nearer they came until when within a hundred feet of the timber, they sprung upon the backs of their ponies, and dashed forward with yells like fiends from the infernal regions.

They had expected to stampede all of the horses of the Texans, after the clever and daring work of the warrior in cutting the ropes, and thus have the Rangers dismounted upon the prairie, far from help, and wholly at their mercy.

But Sam's cunning had thwarted them, and instead they beheld a sheet of flame burst forth from the dark timber, and one-third of their warriors and ponies went down, while the remainder turned in wild dismay, followed by the fierce Rangers.

This act of Sam's gained him still greater notoriety, and when, shortly after, the civil war between North and South broke out, he was made Chief Scout of a Confederate command, and was engaged in many desperate border battles, in one of which, the Lipan fight on the Canadian, he first met the famous Northern scout and Indian-fighter, Buffalo Bill.

Meeting as they did under a flag of truce, at the burial of a man who had been the comrade of both of them, having heard many a wild story told of each other around the camp-fires, these two frontier heroes buried the hatchet between them, and became fast friends from that day, and I may safely say that nothing has ever broken the link of friendship then formed between them.

Though Buffalo Bill served under the "Star Spangled Banner," and with a heroism that is a matter of history, and Buckskin Sam upheld the tattered "Bonnie Blue Flag" of the "Lost Cause," the latter regarded the Union Scout with the same kindness that he did his comrade in arms, the lamented Texas Jack, to whose memory he wrote the following beautiful lines:

BUCKSKIN SAM'S TRIBUTE TO TEXAS JACK.

No more will he turn the wild stampede
With whoop and yell on galloping steed;
No more take the red-man's moccasined track,
'Mid bow-string's twang and rifle's crack;
No more with rare skill his lasso whirl,
Or through the air his dread bowie hurl;
No more be poised on the mustang's back.

And drive wild herds on the northern track;
No more the "black snake" deftly swing;
No more on the Llanos will his rifle ring—
The far-away trails his feet have trod
Will know him no more—he has gone to God!

Lay him to rest in his narrow home
Beneath the sky, earth's natural dome,
Where Southern verdure luxuriant grows,
Ne'er withered by icy Northern snows;
There, 'neath the Spanish moss and pine,
Where myriads of flowering creepers twine,
Let him repose in Nature's wild,
Fit resting-place for Nature's child.
There would I dig in grassy bank,
Afar from noisy cow-bells' clank,
Where oft the red-man leaves his track,
A fitting grave for Texas Jack.
There would I lay him down to rest
Amid the scenes that he loved best;
I'd dig his lone grave long and wide,
And lay his rifle by his side;
I'd coil his lariat 'round his feet,
His serape use for a winding sheet.

But be his grave in wildwood made
Or in the city's busy mart,
Carve on the stone, in words of gold,
"HERE LIES A NOBLE HEART."

CHAPTER XXV.

CONCLUSION.

Of the gallant service of Buckskin Sam while "wearing the gray" I will not speak, as it is best to

"Let the dead past
Bury its dead"

where the battles were between the Northland and the Southland.

But, incapacitated by wounds from active service for awhile, Sam returned to Texas to find that Joe Booth had deserted the ranch to become a soldier, and had won the well-deserved title of Reckless Joe for his daring deeds.

With what money he had saved, Buckskin Sam invested in the hotel business, becoming the youthful and popular proprietor of the Moodie House of San Antonio.

But being "mine host" suited Sam until Cortina, known as the Swamp Fox and Cortina El Ranchero, invaded Texas with a large force of Mexicans, and then he went to the front once more, splendidly armed and mounted, and joined Donaldson's Rangers, of which band he was delighted to find his old friend, Reckless Joe, also a member.

The several companies of dashing Rangers, all under Colonel Ford, marched for the Rio Grande, occupied Brownsville, and took the up-river trail, leaving their red mark upon the cruel Mexicans who had dealt so mercilessly with Texans.

As the colonel wished for particular tidings from the Mexican camp, Buckskin Sam volunteered as a spy, and swam the Rio Grande at night and entered Matamoras, and returned with most important news.

Upon a second attempt he was captured.

but pretending to be a Mexican, and looking like one, as well as speaking the language perfectly, while he told a straight story of his escape from the fierce Texas Rangers, he was taken to Cortina, who questioned him closely and then made him a courier on his staff.

For some weeks Sam was forced to accept this position, being unable to escape; but he sought to gain all the information possible, and was planning an escape, when one day he was recognized by some Mexicans who knew him and denounced him as an American spy.

Sam well knew his instant death would follow, and to throw himself upon the back of a splendid steed that belonged to Cortina, and dash away, was the work of an instant.

He was quickly followed and a warm chase was the result, in which Sam did some deadly firing, and was himself twice wounded, as was also his horse.

But he reached the Rio Grande, urged the failing animal into the turbid stream and swam for the other shore.

But his horse sunk under him ere he got half across and he had to trust wholly in himself and reached the opposite bank just as some Rangers dashed up and drove back his pursuers.

But to dwell upon the wild, daring life of Buckskin Sam, in the thousand-and-one dangers he successfully met, would make a dozen books such as this, and appear like one long romance, and story of fiction, though in reality stern truth, so I will bring my story to an end.

THE END.

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